DOWNSIZING, HEART ATTACKS, TRUMP, AND POLICE SHOOTOUTS: HOW OCEANIC ART COMES TO MARKET IN 2025

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MICHAEL HAMSON

DOWNSIZING, HEART ATTACKS, TRUMP, AND POLICE SHOOTOUTS: HOW OCEANIC ART COMES TO MARKET IN 2025

With essays by:

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DOWNSIZING, HEART ATTACKS, TRUMP, AND POLICE SHOOTOUTS: HOW OCEANIC ART COMES TO MARKET IN 2025

No, the title is not an exaggeration. What I am presenting here are objects I acquired from those exact circumstances: routine downsizing, fatal heart attack, from collectors contemplating moving out of the United States under the Trump presidency, and a client who was killed in a shootout with agents from the Department of Homeland Security. A couple of those conditions are normal, but others — not so much. While Oceanic art is from another place and time altogether, it cannot escape the chaos that might surround it.

For generations, Oceanic art has entered the market as older collectors age out of their homes and/or die unexpectedly. This is the unfortunate but normal cycle of all worldly possessions. The flow of art coming back onto the market pulses irregularly, but incessantly. It is as old as collecting itself, with each era having its own essence to the process. This present one, within my own tiny sphere of the market, just seems more dire.

Nevertheless, I am quite pleased with the results. As always, the goal for the Parcours des Mondes is to find something special—maybe very rare or unusual and/or of the highest quality of its type. One hopes to find objects fresh to the market and with noteworthy, interesting provenance—something that sets it apart. That makes it worthy of the show and this catalog. Each of the objects presented here is my best attempt at accomplishing that goal.

This catalog is my opportunity to take a breath, sit back, and reflect upon what I was finally able to put together for the year. To both assess each object and, more importantly, come to terms with the group as a whole. The collection does not stand separate from the context of when, where, and how it was assembled. As such, the beauty, rarity, and historical importance found within must be tempered with the loss, heartbreak, and melancholy of its acquisition. To set these objects free, some very good friends have passed.

Michael Hamson
August 2025

1 Tami Island Bowl

Tami Islands, Huon Gulf area, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea
Peter Keller Collection, Newport Beach, CA (K0042)
Late 19th/early 20th century
15 ¾" (40 cm) wide

Collectors exercise their aesthetic judgment in many ways. Sometimes these decisions are quirky and idiosyncratic, even whimsical. Sometimes the approach is more methodical, an almost scientific process assembling images of all known examples and ranking them from worst to best, thereby training one's eye for quality, and at the same time understanding the corpus of that object type.

A field collector approaches the task differently. The corpus of objects is not in books, museums, or galleries but in village houses, stuck up in the rafters, covered in dust, spiderwebs, and rat droppings.

When I was field collecting Tami Island bowls, I started, as was my habit, in the outer reaches of where they might be found. These were once part of centuries-old trade networks that, in effect, scattered the bowls all over the Huon Gulf and Vitiaz Straits. To try and find the oldest bowls, I headed to remote villages high up the volcanic slopes of Umboi Island, the most difficult to access area of this network.

Over a ten-year period, I made numerous extended trips into these villages, often invited up into the rafters of houses where a family's horde of bowls lay nested smallest within larger open side down. I went through each one determining age and quality as quickly as possible before my weight collapsed the rickety rafters and brought down the house of the person kindly selling me a bowl.

In these circumstances, what I learned was to focus on age and uniqueness. The older bowls had more soul, more gravitas, often with painstakingly beautiful designs. A hundred and fifty years ago, these bowls were not mere food containers but auguries of renowned carving centers, manifestations of spiritual connections between trading partners and cherished prestige objects. This vast importance was conveyed in the care and artistry of each bowl.

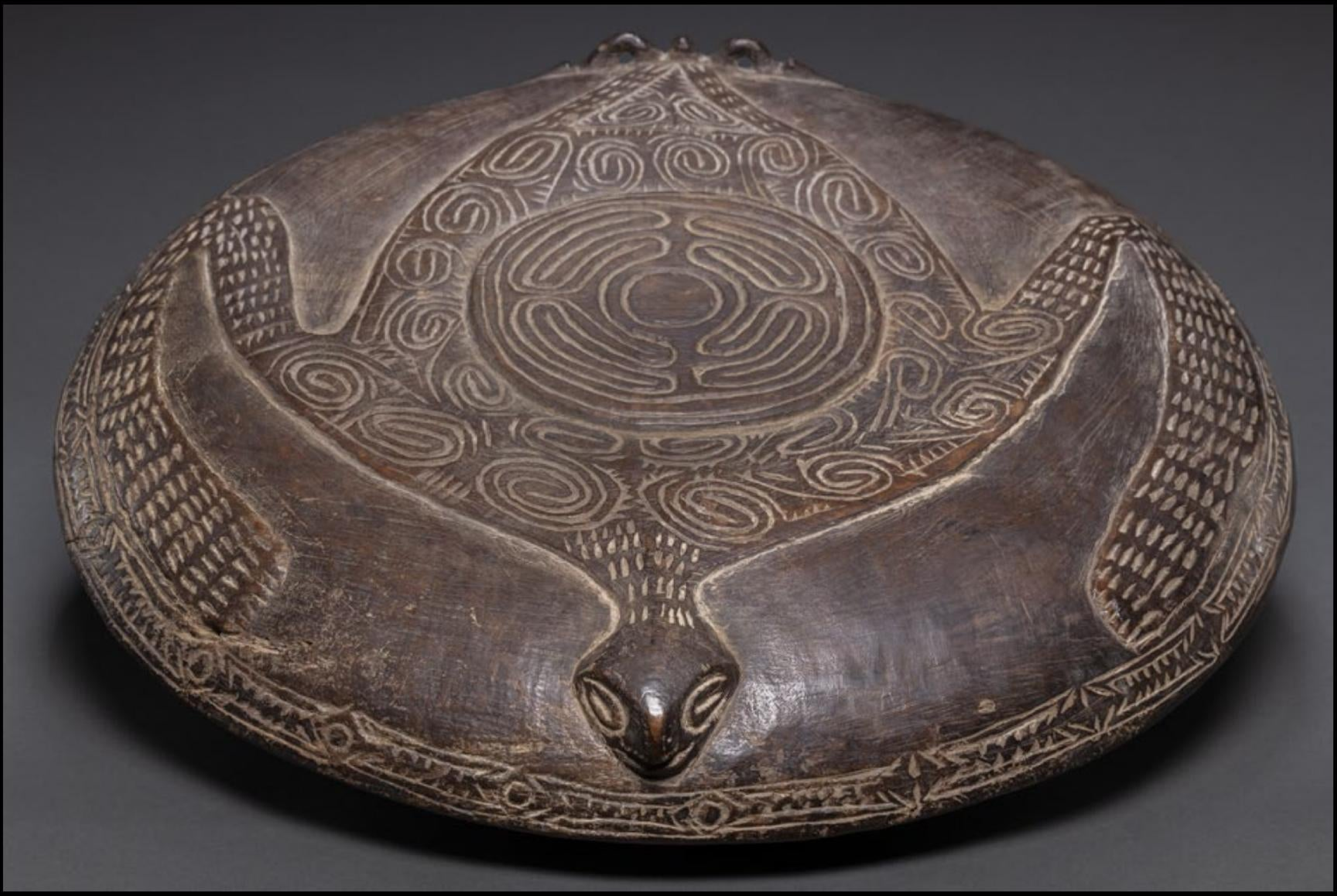
On this one, the central design is of a large fish carved in relief with a smaller fish in its mouth that is at the same time biting a lizard with outstretched hands. The tail of the large fish morphs into the head of a snake. Encircling this main motif of transformation is a broad band of ovals and concentric circles that is both ordered, repetitive, and contained with an incised border below and a raised ridge above. At one end of the bowl are back-to-back birds. I love this combination of free flowing, probably mythical representations of nature enclosed and contained by order and precision.

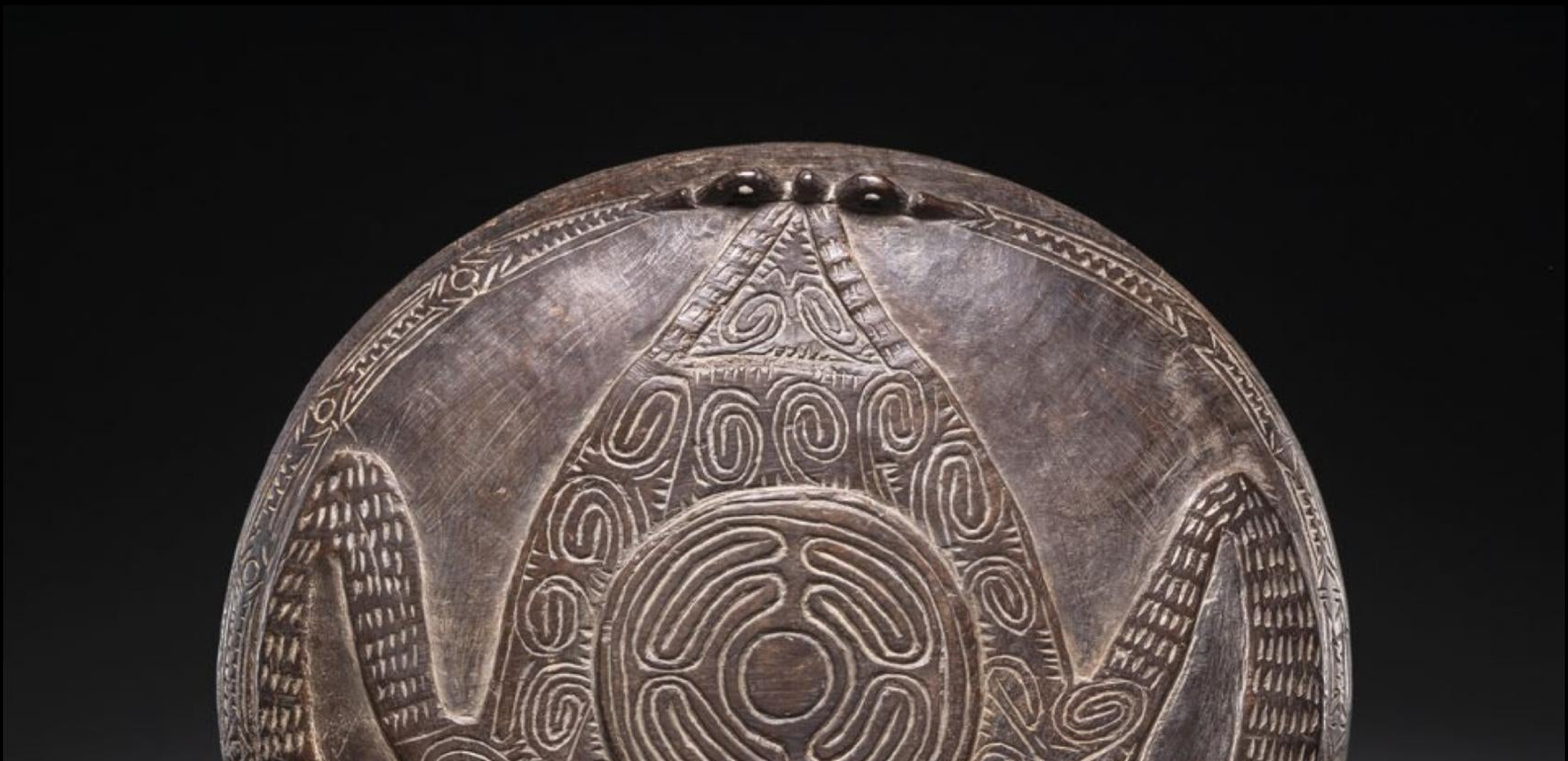
I did not field collect the present bowl but acquired if from the collection of a dear friend recently passed. It represents, in my opinion, the height of Tami Island/Huon Gulf skill and imagination.

2 Large Boiken Plate

Boiken culture area, Coastal Prince Alexander Mountains, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea
Peter Keller Collection, Newport Beach, CA (K0690)
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
24” (61 cm) in diameter

Back in 2011, for my *Art of the Boiken* catalog, Helen Dennett and I wrote an article on the designs found on the bottom of Boiken plates. At that time, we would have designated the figure on the present plate as being a bird due to the notches on what appear to be wings coming out from the body. Yet the collectors of this piece, Peter and Signe Keller, consider the animal depicted to be a turtle and the face in high relief seems to confirm it. Or as with many New Guinea objects, the creatures depicted are either a combination or in transformation from one into another.

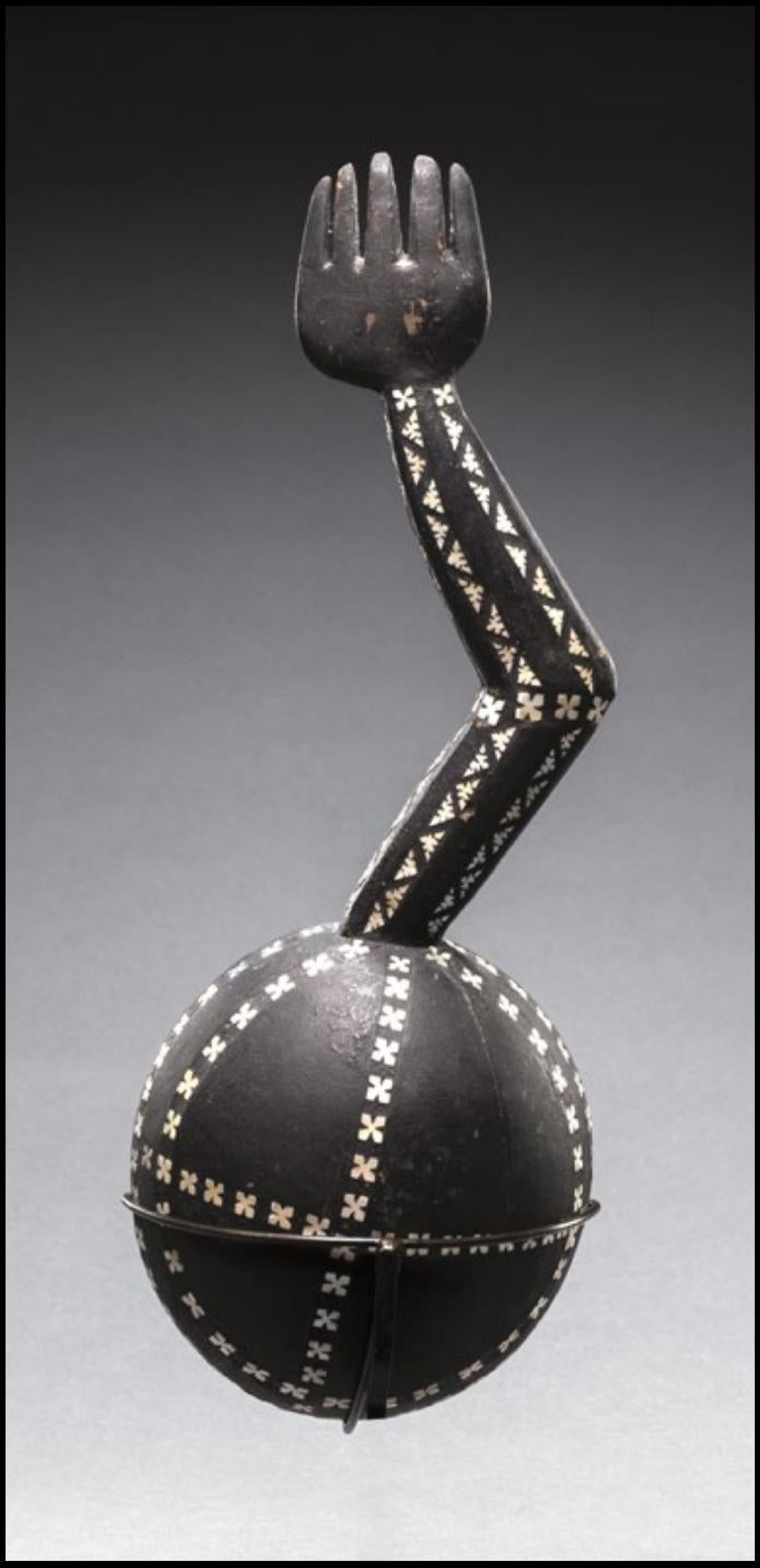




3 Solomon Island Ceremonial Bowl with Hand

Makira Island (previously known as San Cristobal), Solomon Islands
Ex. Evertt Rassiga, Budapest
Steven G. Alpert, Dallas
John Vedder Collection, Portola Valley, CA
Published in *Tribal Arts*, Spring 1997
Late 19th century
16 5/8” (42.2 cm) in length

As Deborah Waite explains in her attached essay, this bowl with outstretched arm is one of only four known—two being in the British Museum. The first collected by Charles F. Wood in the late 1860s and given to the British Museum in 1872. The other acquired in 1929 on Ulawa Island by William Hesketh Lever, First Viscount Leverhulme. The third is illustrated in an old photo from the Australian Museum with a large group of other Solomon Island artifacts.



Bowl with Carved Arm and Hand from Eastern Solomon Islands

By Deborah Waite

People living in the eastern Solomon Islands (e.g. Makira, Ulawa, Uki, Owa Raha and Owa Rihi) have long produced beautiful intricately carved wooden bowls. Their size range is huge - from around 12 feet to a circumference of inches. Many, in particular those from Ulawa, were carved from a light wood called *tapa'a*, the milkweed tree of North Queensland, Australia (Ivens 1927:53). Often, they were intricately inlaid with tiny pieces of nautilus shell.

The carved imagery on bowls of all sizes can be extremely intricate and encompasses primarily frigate bird, anthropomorphic spirit images, fish and other animal forms; all bearing some relationship to the social contexts and identity of their users. If one image predominates, it is the frigate bird, which has always had multiple socially contextual significances.

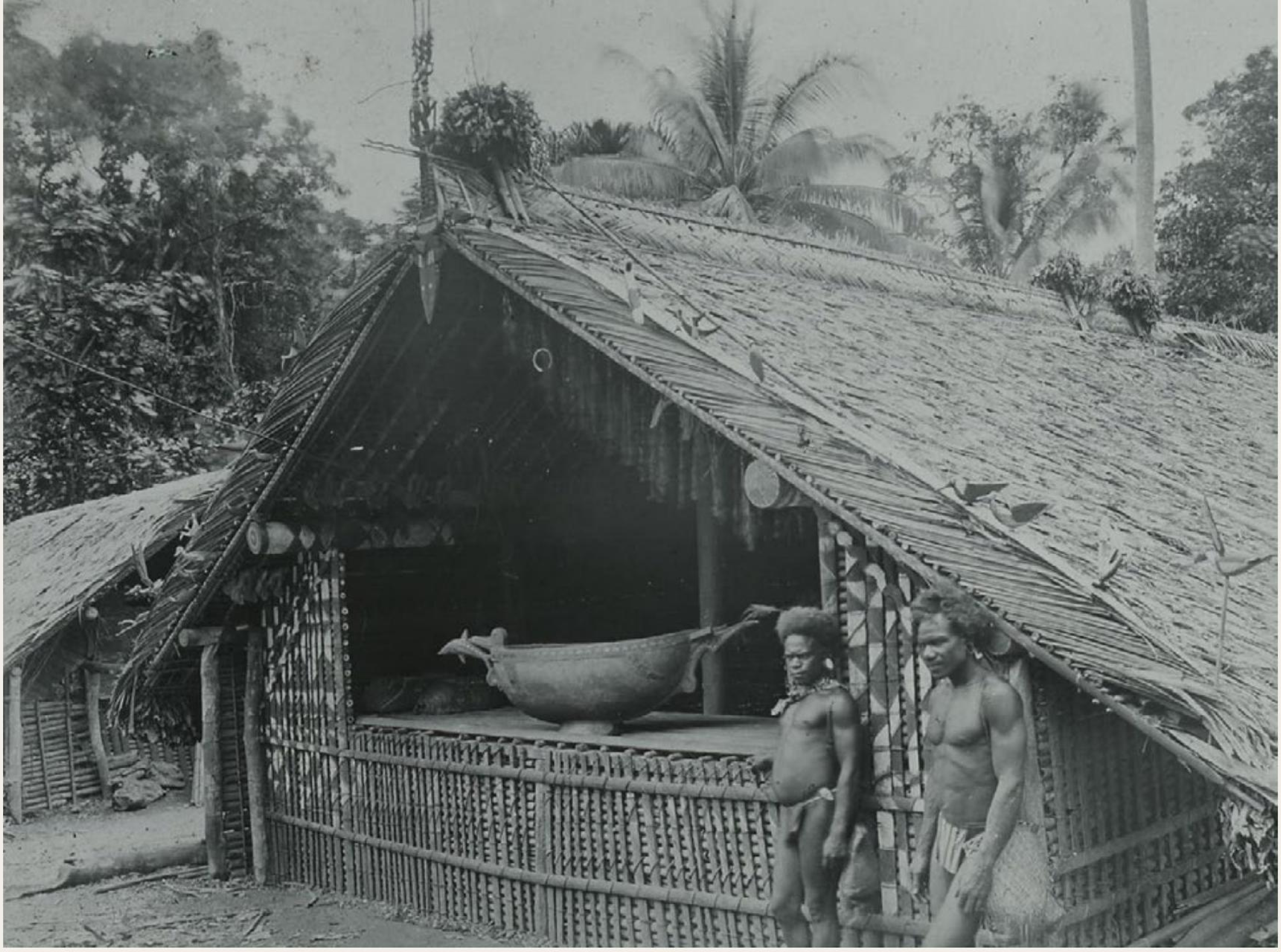
Outsiders ranging from missionaries to anthropologists have recorded many observations about the bowls. Notable sources are Walter Ivens (1927), Charles E. Fox, Hugo Bernatzik (1936), William Davenport (1968, 1971, 1986), Sydney Mead (1973, 1979), and most recently, Sandra Revolon (2007). Valuable comments have been contributed by for example, the Rev, R. Codrington: "The bowls of the south-eastern Solomon Islands [are] remarkable - some of them for their enormous size, some for their fantastic shapes, and for their really beautiful ornamentation"(Codrington 1891:316). Other visitors to the islands acquired bowls (which ultimately became part of museum collections), but with little or no recorded documentation.

Of those who did record contextual information up through the 1970s, Davenport and Mead have supplied the most data regarding the role of artists (Davenport, in particular, dealt in detail with the role of artists in the 1960s and 1970s (1968, 1986). The absence of information from the artists who carved so many bowls acquired by earlier visitors to the eastern Solomon Islands is a major detriment to their study.

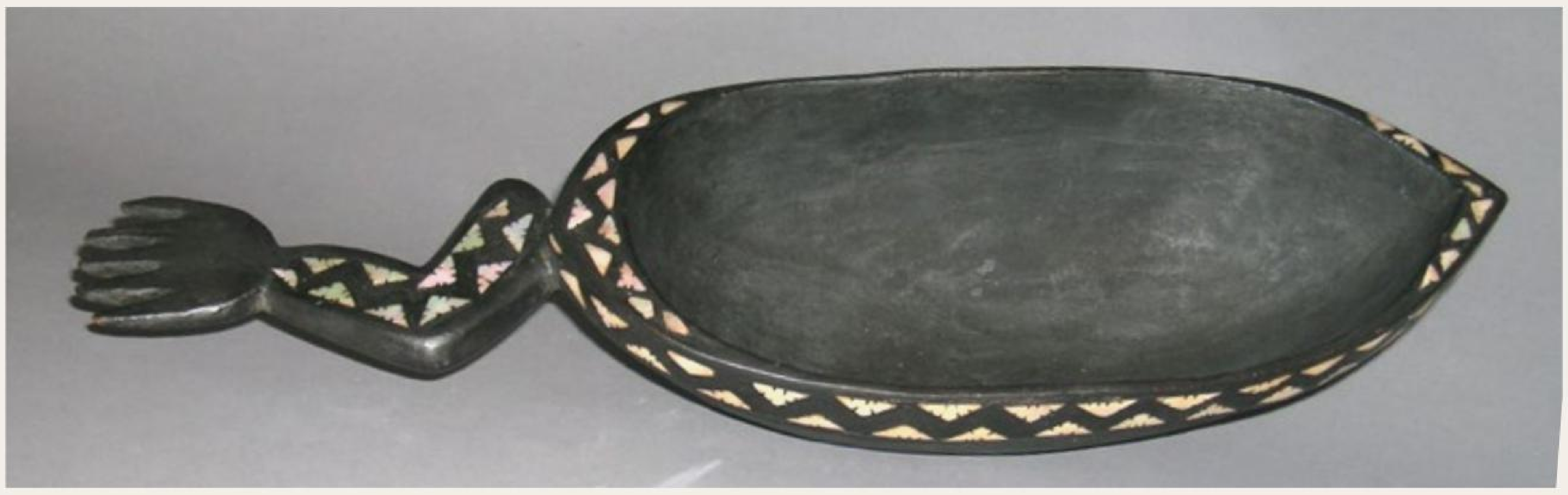
It has long been confirmed that all bowls initially were carved in association with particular social contexts (see, for example, Fox, Ivens, Mead, Davenport). Notable among these were funerals and post-funeral celebrations and the cult of the bonito fish, which in pre-Christian times and thereafter, has been widespread throughout the region. Moreover, participants were (and are) members of specific clans, each of which has long been associated with particular images - e.g. frigate birds or anthropomorphic images of spirits (ataro) whose visual presence on a bowl signified clan association.

This paper represents a broad introduction to the type of bowl imagery featured on this one particular bowl (Figure 2). Although frigate bird imagery dominates many bowls, others display anthropomorphic imagery usually in the form of two figures which flank the bowl. Their presence at each end of a bowl is characteristic of many bowls of small to medium size from all of the islands. Less frequent are standing images holding a bowl on their heads.

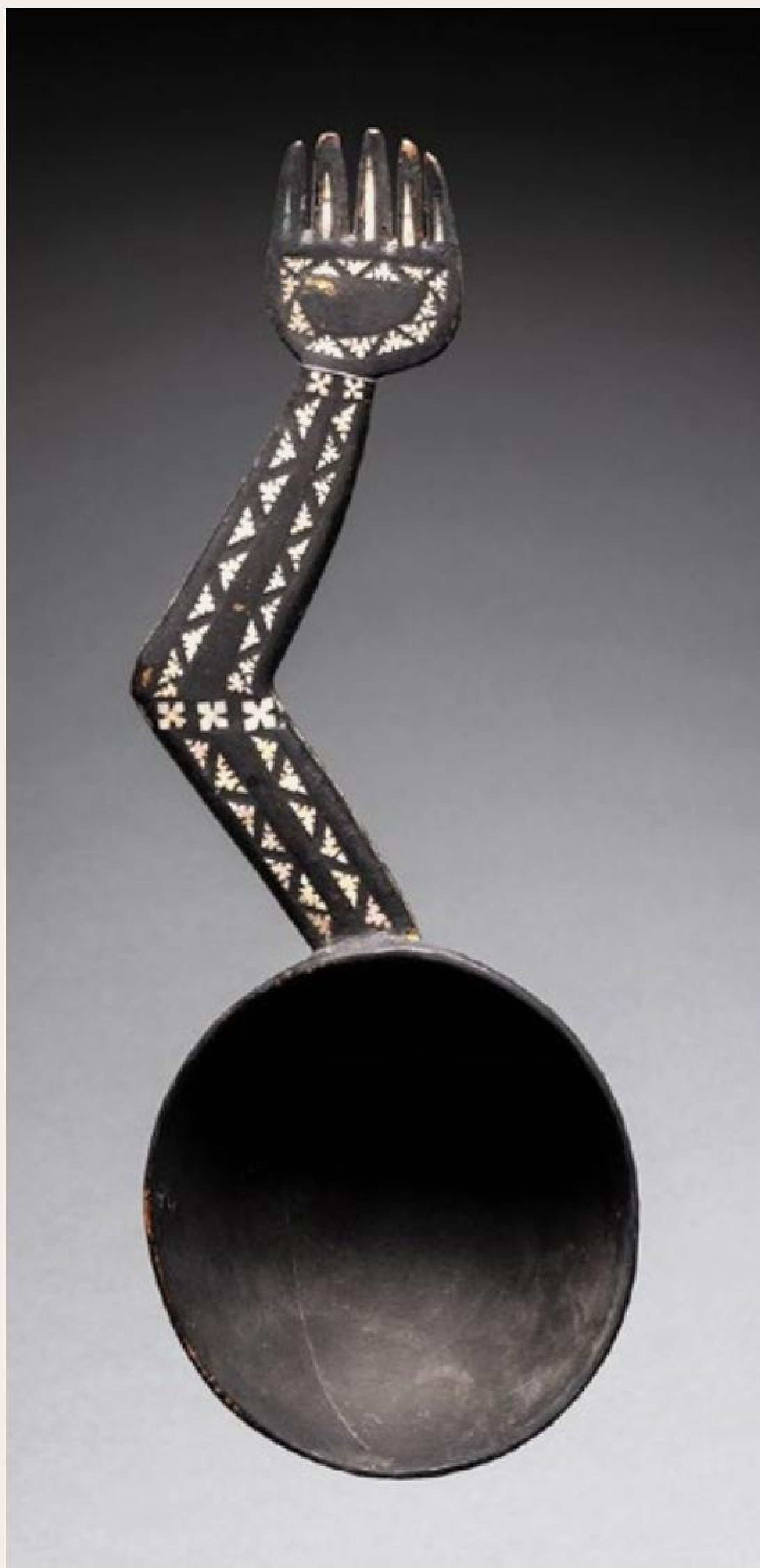
We will return to them, as they may contain a clue as to the arm-hand imagery on the bowl featured in this paper (Figure 2). This bowl appeared to be a much less frequently appearing type in the southeast Solomons. It is a bowl of modest size, (e.g. 16 inches in length), probably a serving bowl with a single extended arm and hand and ornamented with inlaid shell. Two other bowls of this type are in the British Museum. What can be said about them, and what was this single arm and hand which extend prominently from the bowl intended to communicate?



View of *gamal* (sacred thatched roof building) with large wooden bird bowl and two men photographed by John Watt Beattie circa 1913. British Museum Oc,G.T.1983 © The Trustees of the British Museum

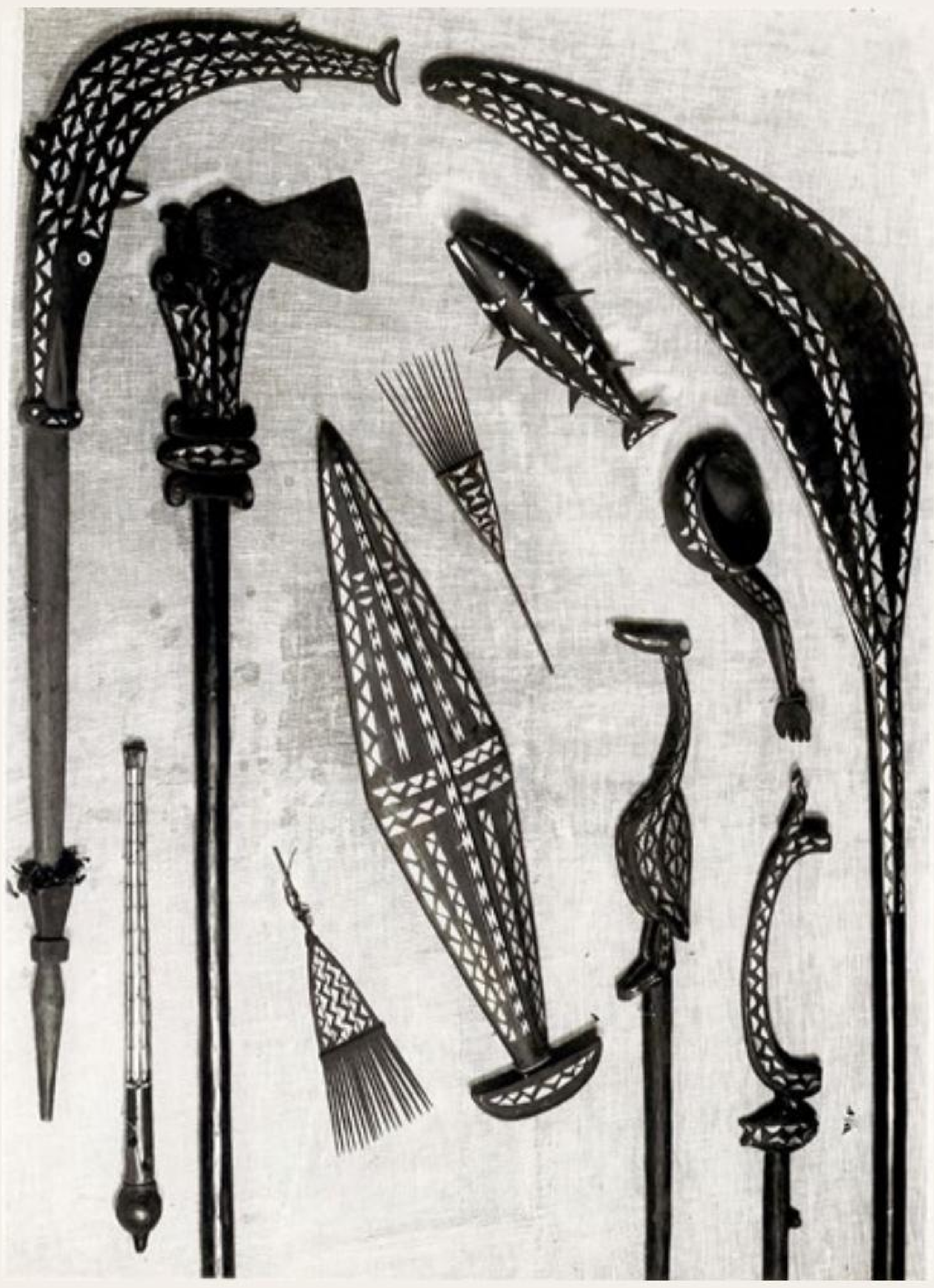


Solomon Island bowl with arm (46 cm), Ulawa, British Museum Oc1929,03034.4 © The Trustees of the British Museum



Solomon Island bowl (42 cm), Ex. Evert Rassiga, Budapest, Steven Alpert, Dallas, John Vedder Collection, Portola Valley, CA.

Two bowls in the British Museum represent principal examples of this bowl type featured in this catalogue. One (Oc 7633) was obtained on Makira Island (formerly called San Cristoval) by Charles F. Wood on one of his Pacific voyages in the late 1760s and was presented to the British Museum on February 16, 1872. Wood acquired several artifacts including three other bowls (British Museum Oc7630, 7631 and 7632). He was obviously interested in obtaining a selection of types. Two of the bowls that he acquired were ornamented with carved frigate bird imagery (Oc7630, 7631) and a third bore the carved head of a dog (Oc7632). The bowl that bears a carved arm with hand (Oc 7633) was described in the museum registry as having “a handle in the form of a human arm”. Edge-Partington described this bowl as “Bowl with hand and human arm, Onuna Bay, San Christoval” (Edge Partington and Heape 1904:194).



Australian Museum photograph of Solomon Island artifacts including bowl with long arm handle (E63783), Gr.l.43.7 mc. Photograph by Hooward Hughes, The Australian Museum, 8 College Street, Sydney.

The second bowl with carved arm in the British Museum (Oc1929,0304.4) was allegedly acquired on Ulawa Island and was presented to the museum by its acquirer, William Hesketh Lever, First Viscount Leverhulme, in 1929 (Figure 3). It belonged to a collection of eleven artifacts including a fishing canoe. The bowl was simply described as a "food bowl inlaid with shell" (British Museum registry). Its width was 46 cm., height 10.5 cm., depth 14.5 cm. (British Museum registry; cf. Braunholz 1929:13-14).

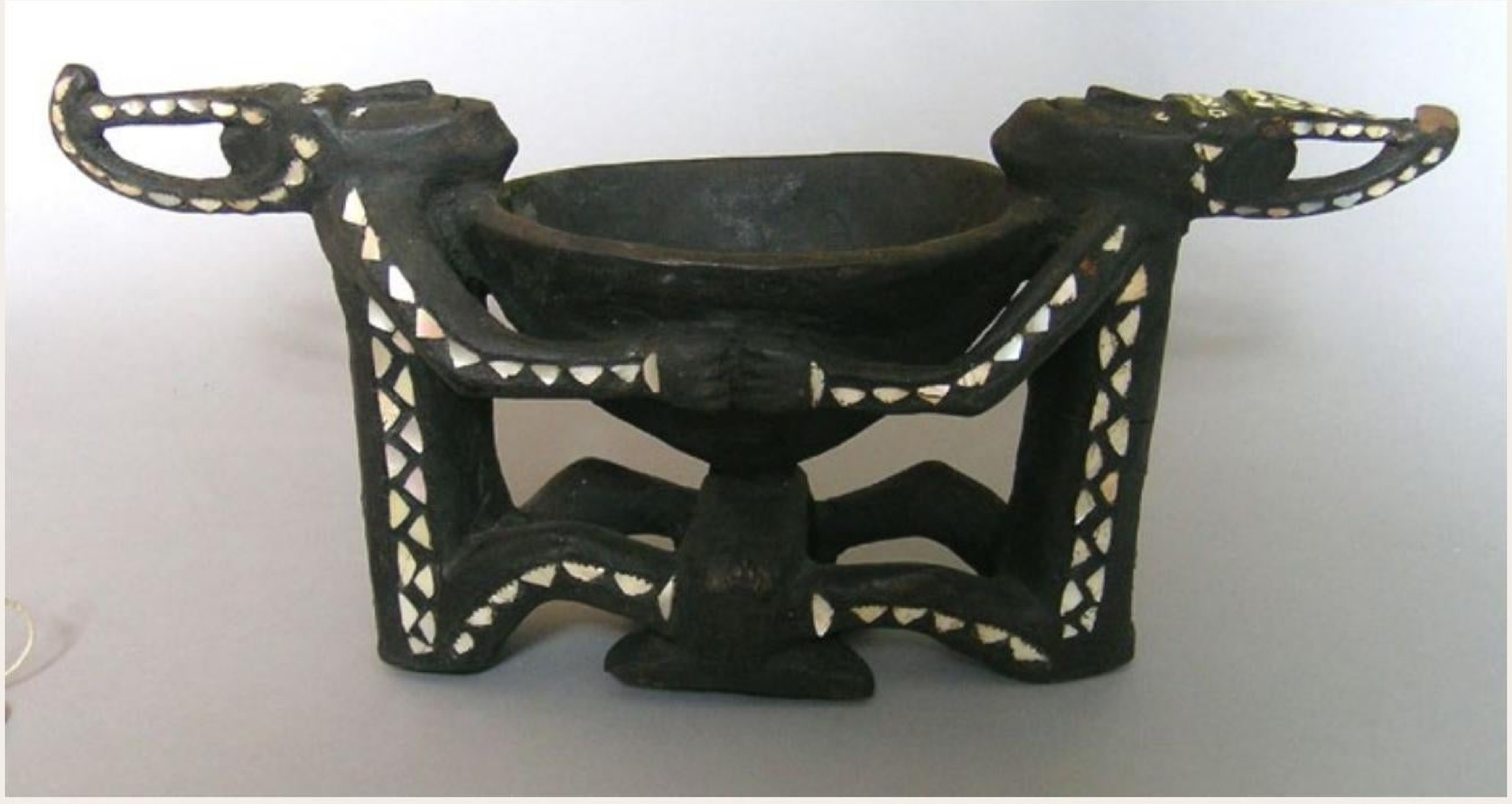
There is not too much evidence for these two bowls that could contribute to an understanding of the principal bowl featured in this catalogue except for island provenance. Wood is particularly disappointing in that he wrote a monograph detailing his travels, "A Yachting Cruise in the South Seas" (King & Company, London, 1875), which was by no means devoid of description but lacking in geographic particulars, names of towns and precise location of bays.

Even more enigmatic is the museum registry description of the Wood bowl as bearing a carved human arm and hand. Why human? Could the absence of any carved figural imagery on the bowl that represented anthropomorphic images of spirits (ataro) have contributed to this attribution? Perhaps a look at other bowls that feature anthropomorphic figures holding up and supporting a bowl on their heads with a definitely visible arm and hand may provide clues.

Carved spirit images appear in several ways on bowls. Many are paired, positioned at each end of a bowl. Their arms may flank and hold the bowl but they are barely visible. Much more visible are the heads and projecting scrolls that define them. By contrast, several bowls collected by C. E. Fox from northern Makira display flanking figures who grasp the bowl with arms that are definitely prominent (e.g. Tuhura Otago Museum, Dunedin, D22.4, D22.386, D22.391. D23.382; cf. also British Museum 1944 Oc2, 1295).

Moreover, several carved images from the different southeast Solomon Islands comprise a single figure bearing a bowl on his head. That bowl is supported by a prominently visible arm (or pair of supportive arms) carved in part in relief on the surface of the bowl (e.g. Basle Vb141, cf. also Sydney E35495, Berlin VI 25087). I would suggest that such images provide a context, so to speak, for arm visibility in direct association with a bowl.

Making a case for such a relationship would require quite a bit of information that is lacking accurate data regarding geographical provenance for bowls with carved arm and hand and images that flank a bowl, their prominent carved arms rendered in high relief on the bowls came originally from northern Makira (see above), but single images bearing a bowl atop their heads with the aid of a strong supportive arm often carved in relief on the side of the bowl vary as to their recorded source. This may prove to be an unsolvable problem, but, visually, the supportive arms of these figures constitute a visual prototype for the three bowls adorned only with an extended arm and hand. Their identity also has to remain undecided: are they representations of spirits - in which case, the "human arm" designation applied by outsiders is incorrect.



Solomon Island bowl (47 cm), Makira, Harry Geoffrey Beasley, donated 1944 by Irene Marguerite Beasley, British Museum Oc1944,02.1295. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Linguistic evidence collected long ago by Walter Ivens and published in 1918 could substantiate the symbolic role of simply a carved arm with hand as it appears on three bowls. Allegedly the Ulawan term 'nima' can be translated as arm (Ivens 1918:69, 118) but also as food bowl. Nima Zarazara Ivens recorded as a "large bowl for feasts"; 'ato nima' he recorded as meaning "to set out bowls of food at a feast"; leoluna nima, "the outside of a bowl" (ibid). A house was/is hale nima (ibid: 125).
For a different set of terms from the Arosi language, north Makira see Fox 1978:484. The word "*nima*", recorded by Ivens, is also documented by Fox and translated into English by him as arm or hand (Fox ibid:373).

These remarks regarding "*nima*" deserve much more analysis by a qualified specialist in linguistics (which I am not) as well as an up-to-date re-examination of the various nima associations. At this point, they, at least suggest that the arm extending from these three bowls was not, as their European observers assumed, a human hand.

The above remarks are not as conclusive as they should be, and more research on the type of bowl ornamented with a carved and inlaid arm and hand is definitely needed.

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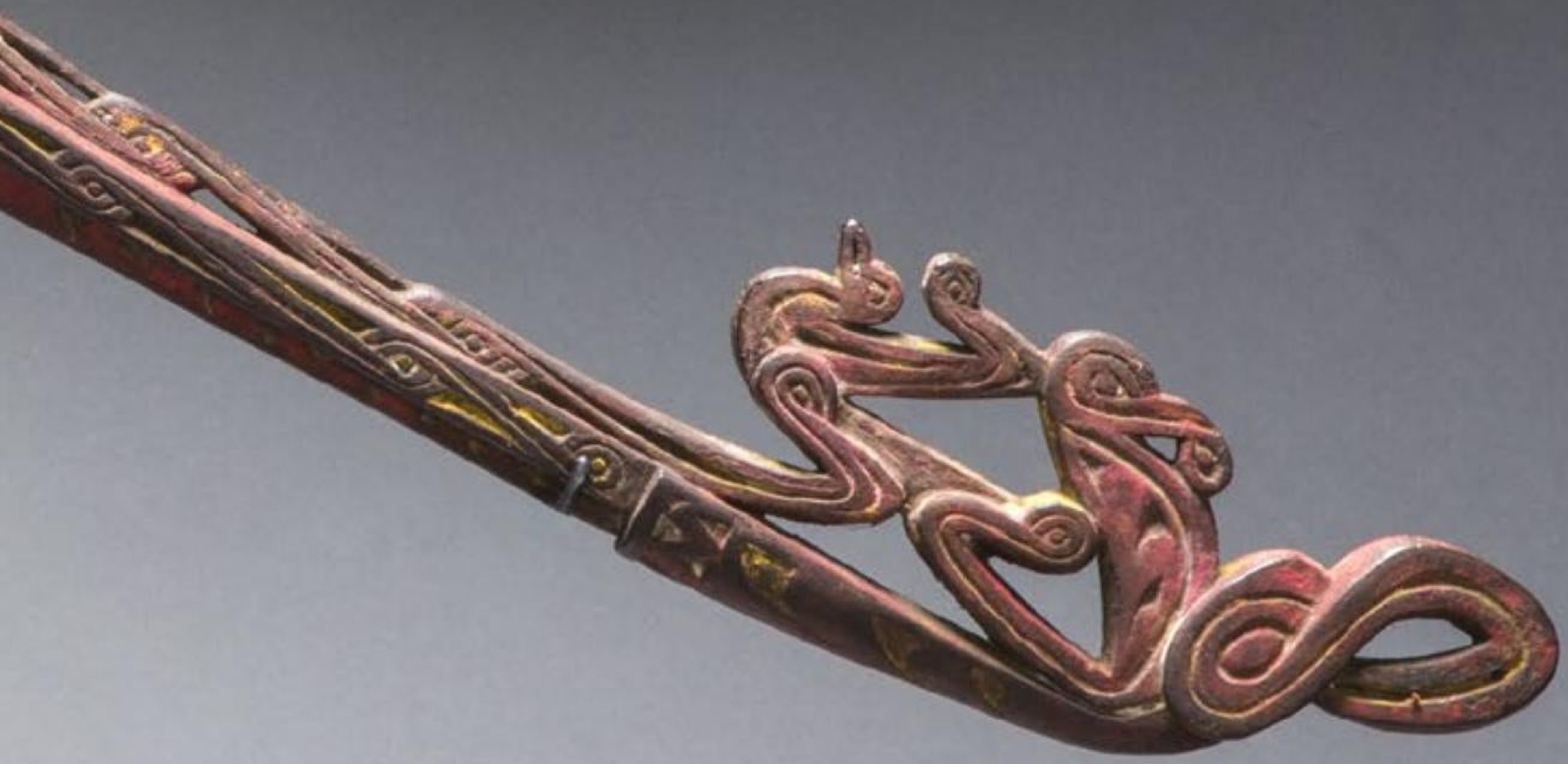
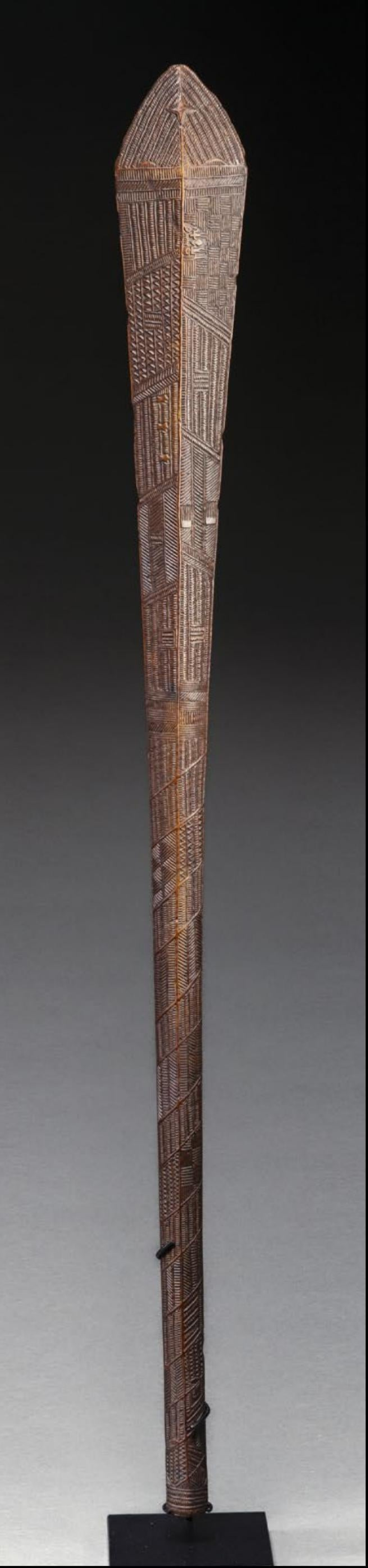
4 Massim Presentation Axe

Panaieti Island, Louisiade Archipelago, Milne Bay Province,
Papua New Guinea
Ex. Michael Kremerskothen, Dortmund
Ex. Harry Tracosas Collection, Madison, WI
19th century
29 7/8” (75.8 cm) in length

Massim presentation axes were used primarily as wealth items with the handle serving as an elaborate holder to the much more prized stone blade. In Douglas Newton’s catalog for the 1975 exhibition “Massim at the Museum of Primitive Art”, he notes the elaborate wooden handles were “merely intended to set off the qualities of the blade...which were assessed in terms of their beauty and age” (Newton, p.5). Yet it is hard not to focus on the colorful elegance of the present handle with its complex interplay of bird forms. The antiquity of the piece is without doubt.





5 Tongan *Akau Tau* Club

Tonga
Edith & Stuart Cary Welch Collection, New Hampshire
Sotheby's New York, 13 May 2011, lot 307
Palos Verdes Estates private collection
Early/mid 19th century
48 ¼" (122.4 cm) in height

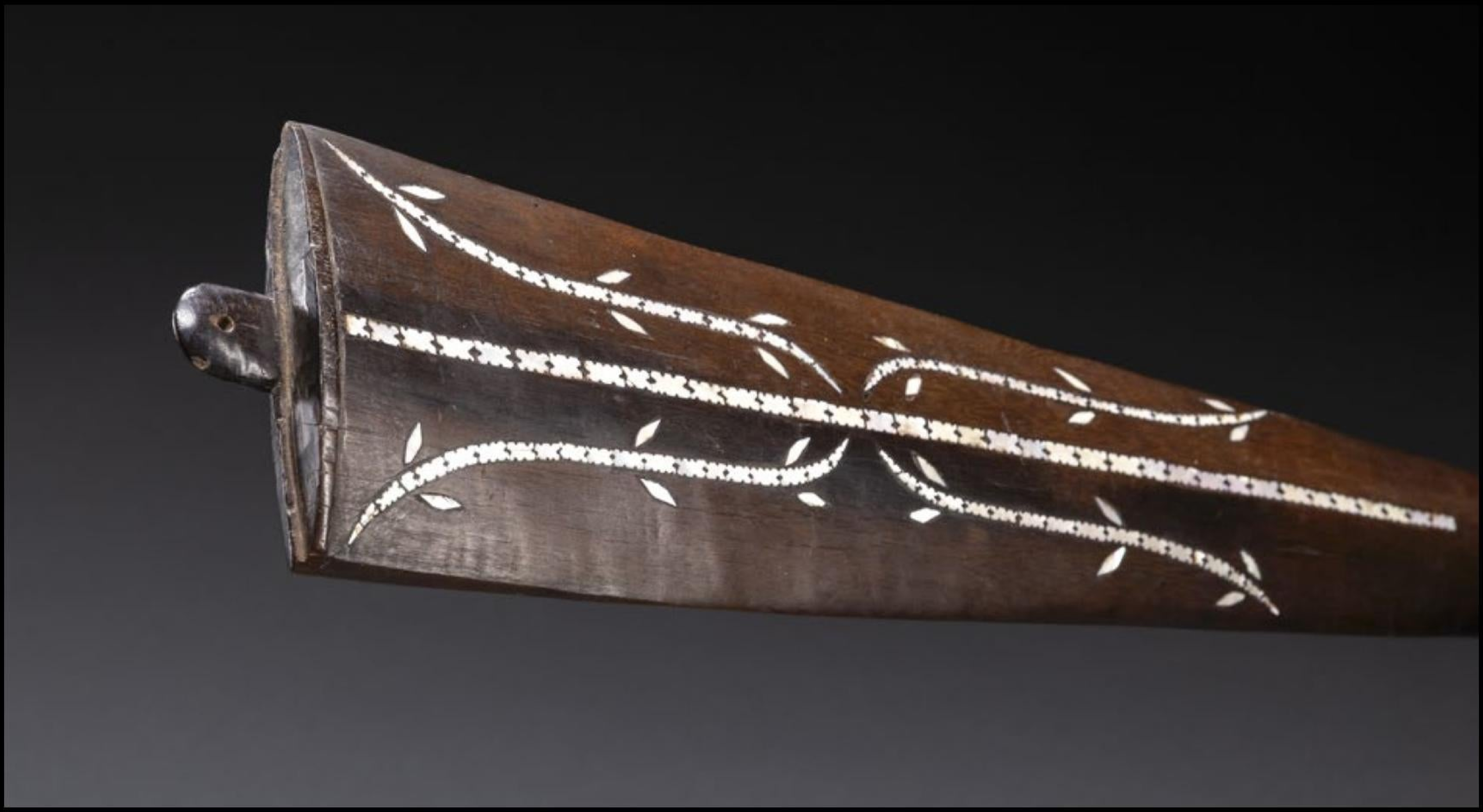
Tongan clubs are indeed beautiful, with their fields of intricately carved designs universally admired for their artistry. But now, many discerning Oceanic art collectors focus on the figurative glyphs that grace the crisscrossed design fields on a small subset of these clubs. These small human and animal motifs populating the surface of Tongan clubs had been noted and appreciated by the early explorers and missionaries. However, none of them seemed to have recorded anything about their potential meaning from the men that carved and used the clubs. So, in the intervening 175 to 200 years since their creation, any concrete interpretation of these glyphs seems a bit dicey.

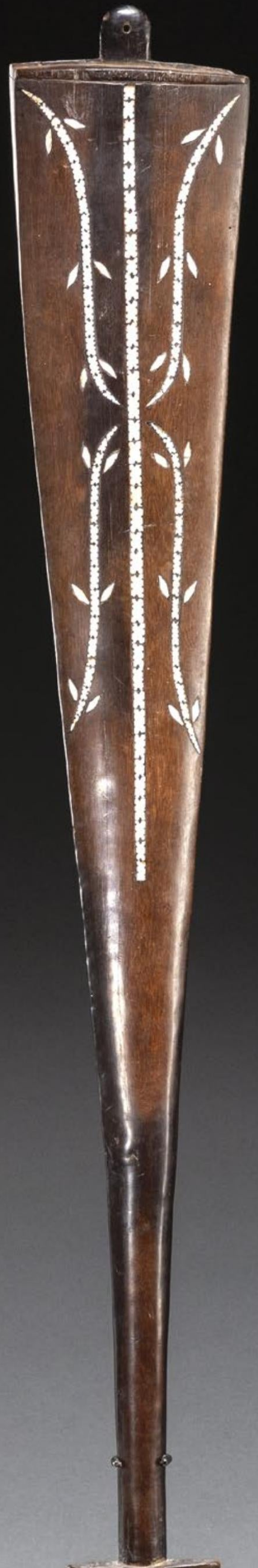
In the absence of anything definitive Adrienne Kaeppler's sober approach to understanding the significance of these glyphs sounds about right: "visual arts are integrally related to verbal arts, and both are used in the service of elevating and honouring the prestige and/or power of individuals or chiefly lines" (Kaeppler 2002:308). That being said, she did venture an opinion on the double figure glyph like the one seen on this club: The left figure with distinct crown of feathers was King Tu'i Tonga himself and the fellow next to him was an attendant holding a fan. But on the opposite side of this club are two decapitated figures which suggests, at least to me, that the round shape Tu'i Tonga and his attendant are holding between them might be a victim's head.

6 Solomon Island Club with Shell Inlay

Malaita Island, Solomon Islands
Morris J. Pinto Collection, Paris
Sotheby’s New York, 9 May 1977, lot 57
Steven G. Alpert, Dallas
John Vedder Collection, Portola Valley, CA, acquired from the above on 13 February 1997.
Late 19th century or before
34” (86.4 cm) in height.

The beauty and refinement of this Solomon Island club is obvious. What is less so is its age. This is a very old club. One needs to have it in hand to feel the balance and the extremely worn and glossy surface to get a sense of the generations this piece had been in the field prior to collection. The wood surface has that ripple and undulations felt on only the earliest South Pacific weapons.

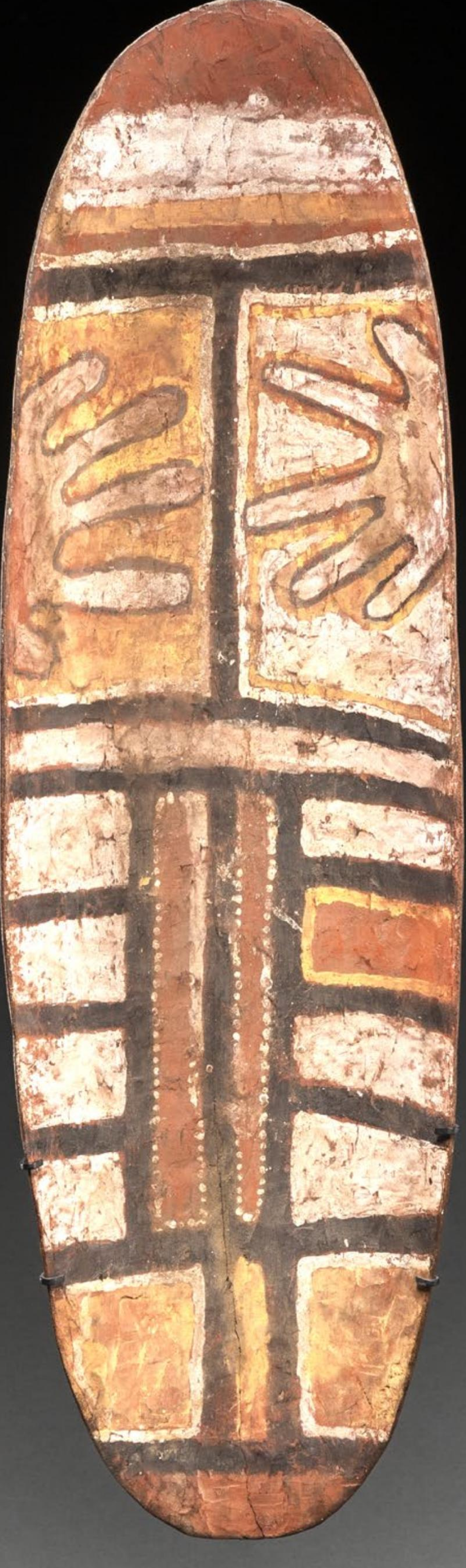




7 Australian Aboriginal Coolamon

East Kimberley area, Western Australia
Kirby Kallas-Lewis, Seattle
Early 20th century
29 ¼” (74.2 cm) in height

What I love most about this aboriginal Coolamon carrier are the bold colors and the stenciled hand motif reminiscent of those found in Australian cave paintings.



8 Large Papuan Gulf Bullroarer

Purari Delta area, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea
Ex. James Duthoo Collection, Paris
Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede
Harry Tracosas Collection, Madison, WI
Published in “le Musee vivant” in *L’Art Oceanien*,
texts by Guillaume Apollinaire and Tristan Tzara
published by Madeleine Rousseau, Paris 1951,
Fig. 31.
Late 19th/early 20th century
43 1/8” (109.4 cm) in height.

James Duthoo was an artist, ceramist, engraver, and abstract painter who belonged to the abstract expressionist school in Paris of the 1940s and 1950s. He was among the friends of Madeleine Rousseau. He presented his first show with South Pacific art in Paris in 1946.

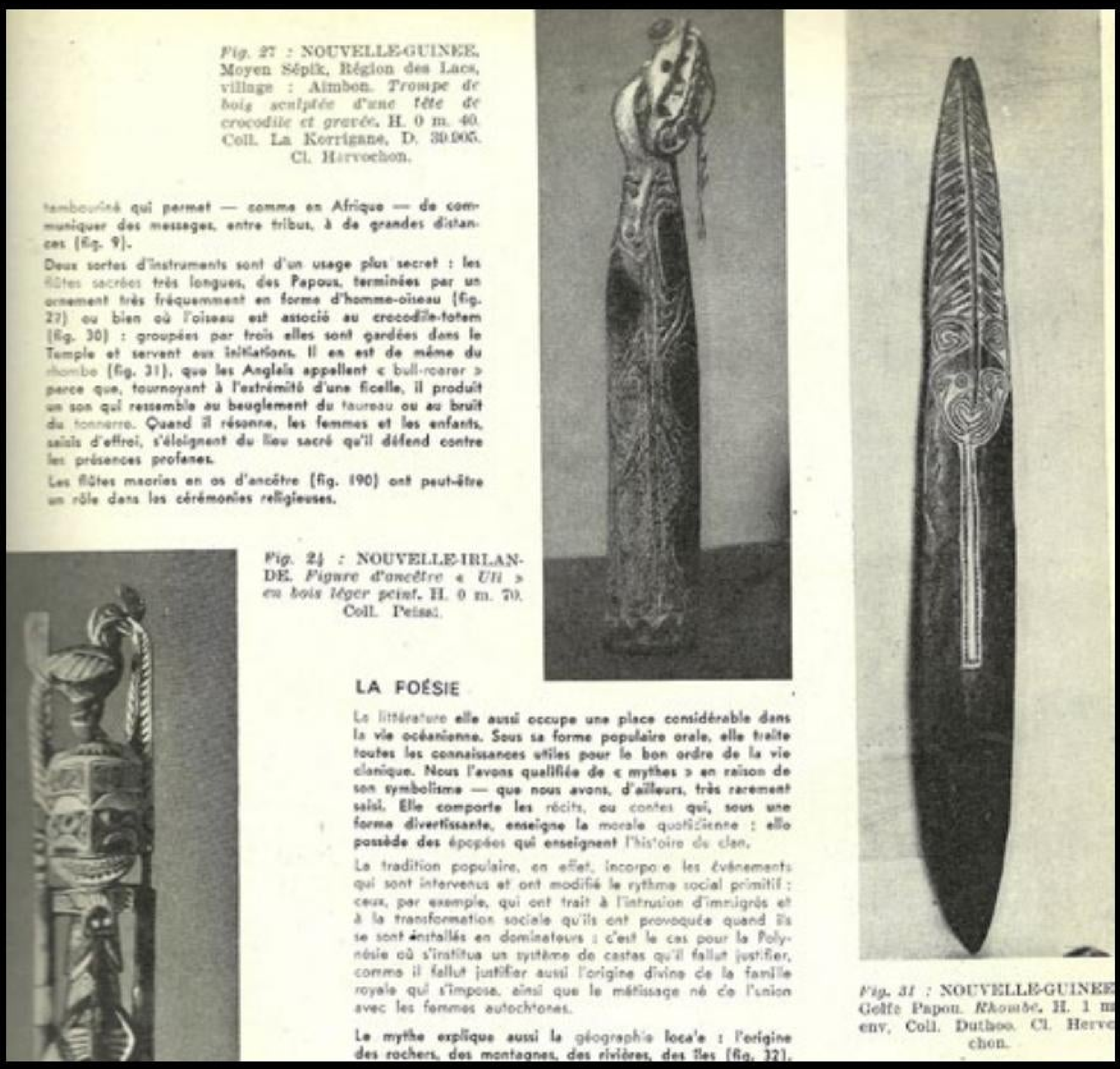


Fig. 27 : NOUVELLE-GUINEE. Moyen Sépik, Région des Lacs, village : Aimbon. *Trompe de bois sculptée d'une tête de crocodile et gravée*. H. 0 m. 40. Coll. La Korrigane, D. 30.905. Cl. Hervochon.

tambouriné qui permet — comme en Afrique — de communiquer des messages, entre tribus, à de grandes distances (fig. 9).

Deux sortes d'instruments sont d'un usage plus secret : les flûtes sacrées très longues, des Papous, terminées par un ornement très fréquemment en forme d'homme-oiseau (fig. 27) ou bien où l'oiseau est associé au crocodile-totem (fig. 30) : groupées par trois elles sont gardées dans le Temple et servent aux initiations. Il en est de même du rhombe (fig. 31), que les Anglais appellent « bull-roarer » parce que, tournoyant à l'extrémité d'une ficelle, il produit un son qui ressemble au beuglement du taureau ou au bruit du tonnerre. Quand il résonne, les femmes et les enfants, saisis d'effroi, s'éloignent du lieu sacré qu'il défend contre les présences profanes.

Les flûtes maories en os d'ancêtre (fig. 190) ont peut-être un rôle dans les cérémonies religieuses.

Fig. 24 : NOUVELLE-IRLANDE. *Figure d'ancêtre « Uli » en bois léger peint*. H. 0 m. 70. Coll. Peissi.

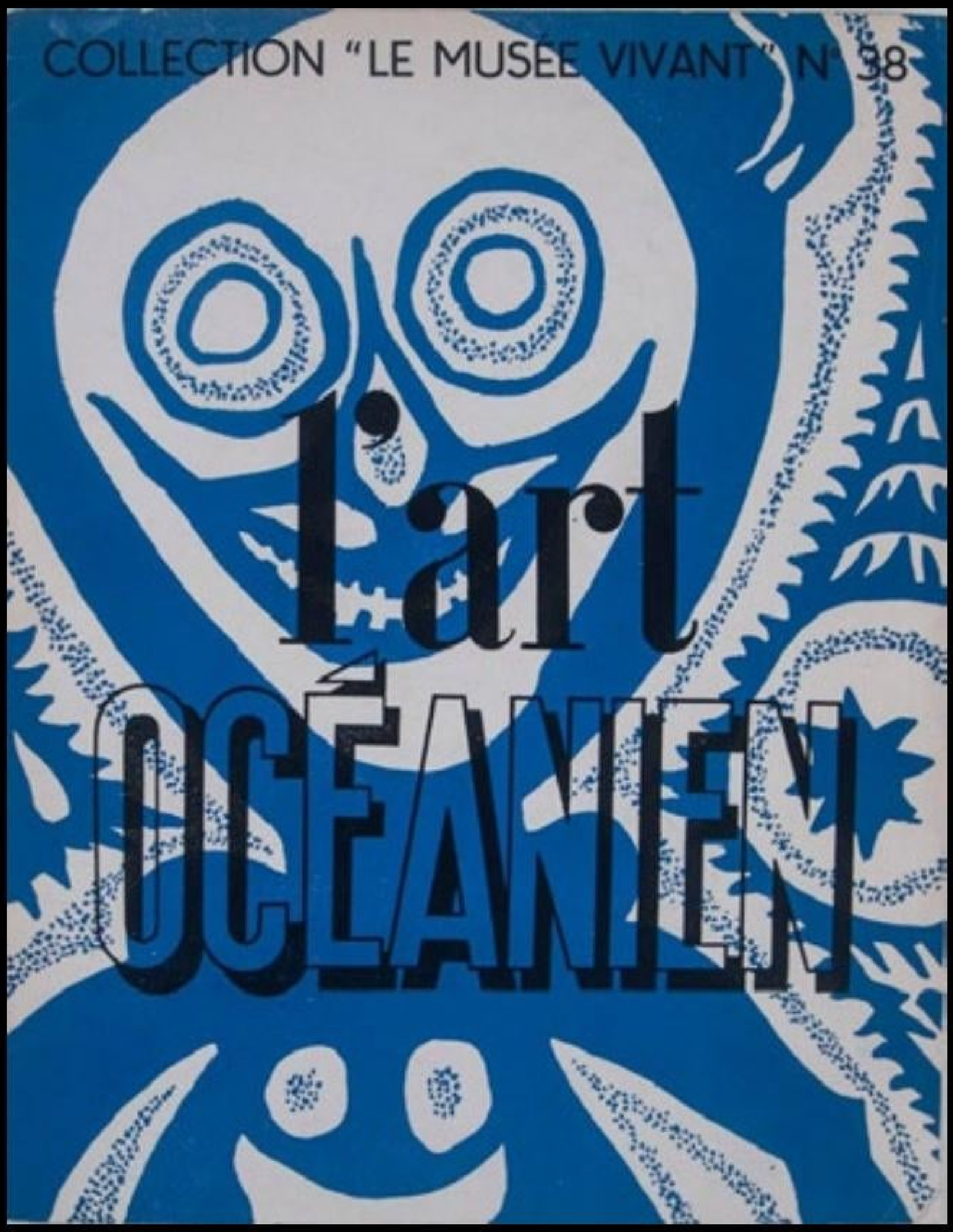
LA POÉSIE

La littérature elle aussi occupe une place considérable dans la vie océanienne. Sous sa forme populaire orale, elle traite toutes les connaissances utiles pour le bon ordre de la vie clanique. Nous l'avons qualifiée de « mythes » en raison de son symbolisme — que nous avons, d'ailleurs, très rarement saisi. Elle comporte les récits, ou contes qui, sous une forme divertissante, enseigne la morale quotidienne : elle possède des épopées qui enseignent l'histoire du clan.

La tradition populaire, en effet, incorpore les événements qui sont intervenus et ont modifié le rythme social primitif : ceux, par exemple, qui ont trait à l'intrusion d'immigrés et à la transformation sociale qu'ils ont provoquée quand ils se sont installés en dominateurs : c'est le cas pour la Polynésie où s'institua un système de castes qu'il fallut justifier, comme il fallut justifier aussi l'origine divine de la famille royale qui s'impose, ainsi que le métissage né de l'union avec les femmes autochtones.

Le mythe explique aussi la géographie locale : l'origine des rochers, des montagnes, des rivières, des îles (fig. 32).

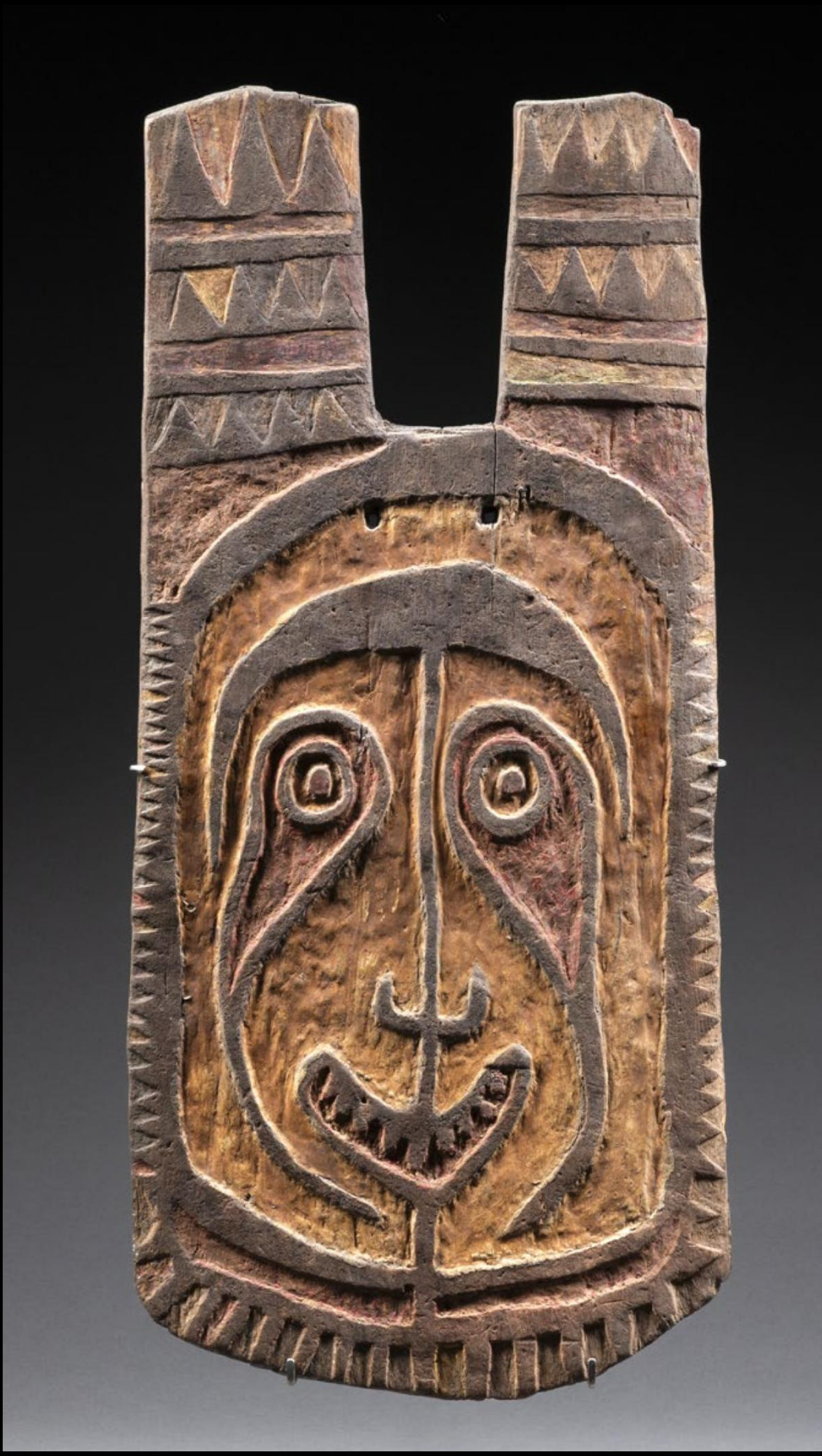
Fig. 31 : NOUVELLE-GUINEE
Golfe Papou. *Rhombe*. H. 1 m
env. Coll. Duthoo. Cl. Herve
chon.



9 Papuan Gulf Shoulder Shield

Elema culture area, Gulf Province,
Papua New Guinea
Richard Aldridge, Perth
Sam & Sharon Singer Collection, San Francisco
Published in *Red Eye of the Sun: The Art of the Papuan Gulf*, by Michael Hamson & Richard Aldridge, 2010, no. 48
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
32 ½” (82.5 cm) in height

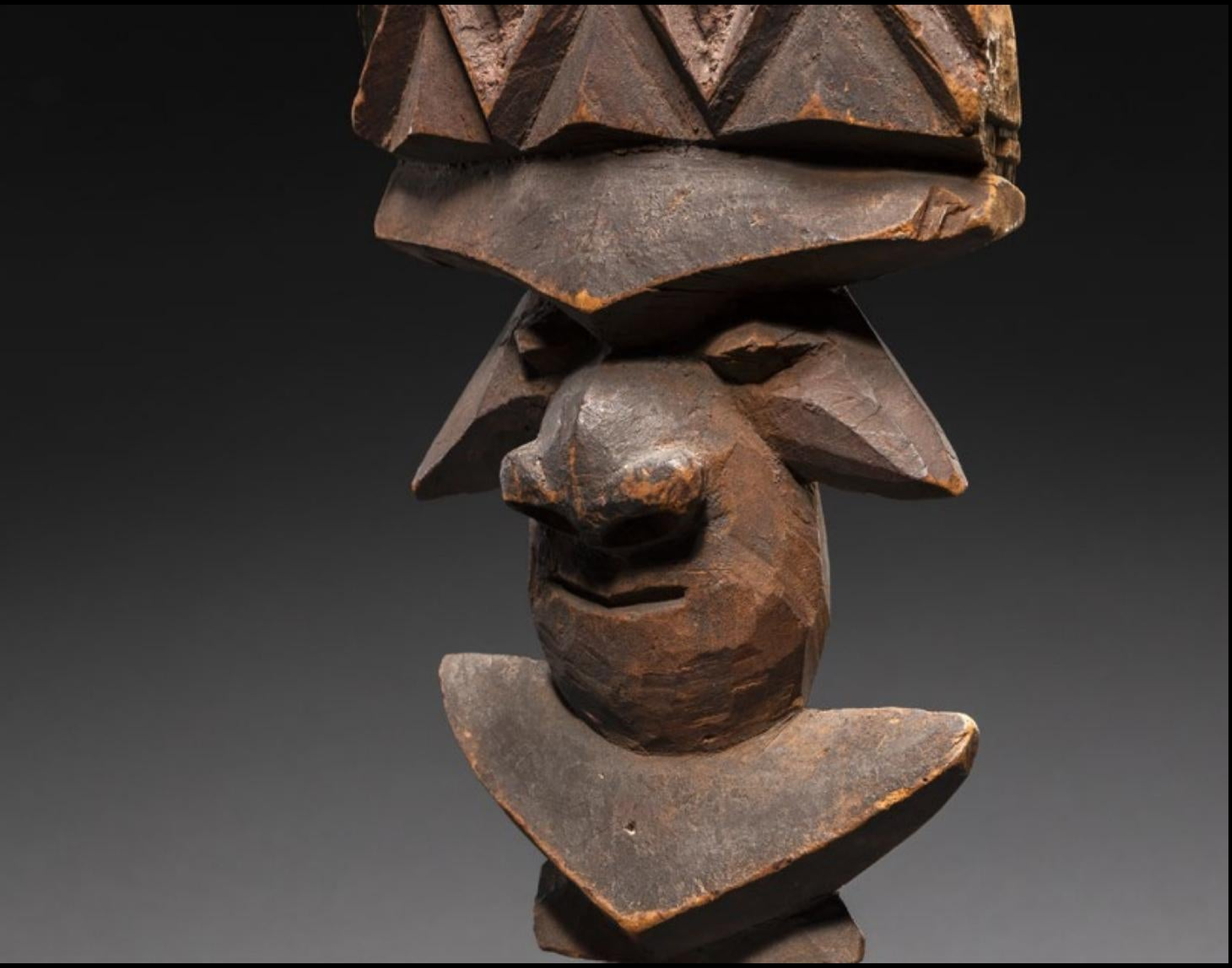
Shields such as this were worn by men over their left shoulders so they could pull back the bow string with their right hand. Reg MacDonald notes that the notch cut into the top was to allow the shield to fit snugly under the arm of the warrior (MacDonald, in Beran and Craig, 2005, p. 168). The spirit face depicted is classic and pared down to just the essential features of an inverted crescent for the forehead and the circular eyes with outlines that trail down the cheeks to either side of the smiling, tooth-filled mouth. The nose is a simple squared-off “U” shape. Surrounding the face on three sides are dentate motifs that again, when viewed from the side, suggest the open mouth of a beast. This shield, whose use is associated with a man’s deadliest endeavor, depicts a scene of customary rebirth that is both apt and poignant.



10 New Caledonia Roof Spire

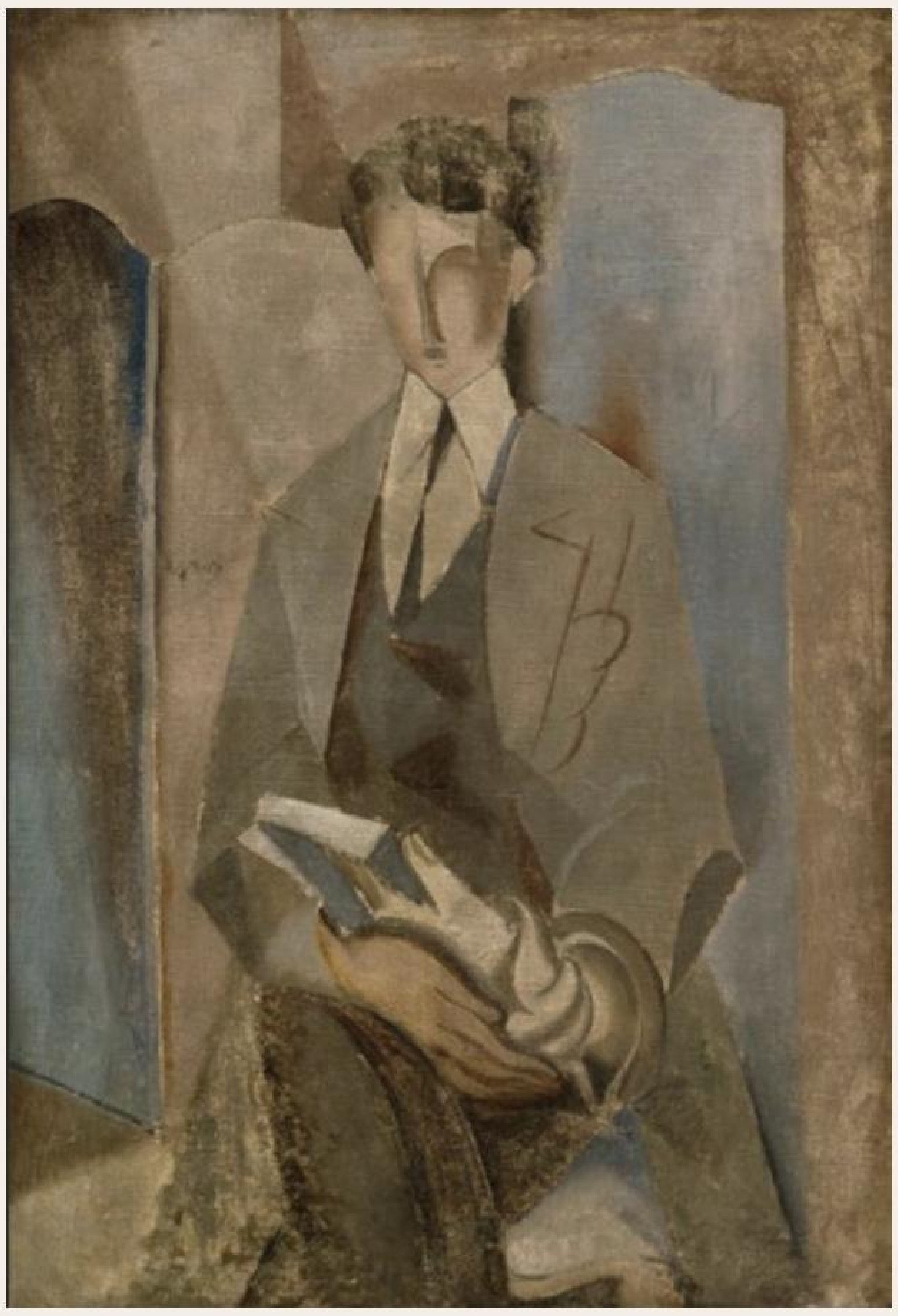
New Caledonia
Ex. Roland Tual Collection, Paris
Drouot, Art Primitif: Collection Roland Tual, 9-11 February 1930, lot 51
Georges Sadoul Collection, Paris
Loudmer, Arts Primitifs, Ancienne Collection Georges Sadoul, June 20, 1996, lot 16.
Kirby Kallas-Lewis, Seattle
Late 19th/early 20th century
23 5/8” (60 cm) in height

Please note the faint remains of red pigments and the rare Kichizô Inagaki wooden base.



Roland Tual (1902-1956)

By Philippe Bourgoin



André Masson (1896-1987), Portrait of Roland Tual, 1921-1922. Oil on canvas, 75 x 50 cm. Gift of Louise and Michel Leiris, 1984. © Centre Pompidou, Paris, AM 1984-680.

A film producer and director, and a close friend of André Masson (1896-1987) and Michel Leiris (1901-1990), Roland Tual was a discreet and even secretive man who was actively involved with all of the art forms of his century and exerted a major influence on many avant-garde writers and artists.

Born into a modest family, his father, Alexandre Marie Tual, was a cooper, and his mother, Justine Brunet, was a day laborer. As early as 1920, apparently abandoning his studies, he befriended poets Robert Desnos (1900-1945), Max Jacob (1876-1944) and Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), illustrator Max Morise (1900-1973) and art dealer Henri Kahnweiler (1884-1979).

During the winter of 1921, André Masson moved to 45 Rue Blomet. His studio, next door to that of Joan Miró (1893-1983), became a meeting place for the young artists and writers who would become part of the Surrealist movement. It was undoubtedly through contact with his new comrades that Tual discovered the so-called “primitive” arts. He soon became involved in the activities of the group, led by the dominant personality of André Breton (1896-1966). Following in the footsteps of Dada, Surrealism was an intellectual, literary and artistic movement whose objective was to shatter the traditional conceptions of art through provocation and derision.

On the evening of Wednesday December 20, 1922, Charles Dullin’s (1885-1949) production of *Antigone* by Sophocles (5th century B.C.) was performed at the Théâtre de l’Atelier, in a free adaptation by Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), whom Breton had been vindictively pursuing! The latter, along with Tual, Morise, Louis Aragon (1897-1982), Raymond Duncan (1874-1966), André Gide (1869-1951) and other members of their group invaded the auditorium, causing a commotion and pandemonium. Audiences remained enthusiastic about the play though, and it continued a run of about a hundred performances.

Tual participated in the sessions of the Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes (October 1924 - April 1925). He lived modestly, in a hotel on Square Choiseul, where his next-door neighbors were Juliette (1902-1978) and Marcel Achard (1899-1974), the future playwright, with whom he maintained friendly relations. In this context, new views of other systems of thought and creation were considered, prompting many avant-garde artists to appropriate certain kinds of artistic production from other cultures. Whether from Oceania, Africa or the Americas, the “wild” object played an important role not only in Surrealism, but also in the collections of poets and artists.

But above and beyond their magic, these objects had a concrete exchange value, and Tual, like many of his companions, found himself working as a broker to make a living. What may rightly be seen as the most important tribal art event of the first half of the 20th century was the Galerie Surréaliste’s first exhibition called *Tableaux de Man Ray et objets des îles*. It was directed by Tual and hosted by Breton, and opened on

March 26, 1926, on Rue Jacques Callot in Paris. The cover of the catalog features a photograph by Man Ray (1890-1976) titled *La lune brille sur l'île Nias (The Moon Shines on the Island of Nias)*, in which a Nias Island (Indonesia) *adu zatua* figure from André Breton's collection is placed on a mirrored surface representing the ocean, with a moon in the background – an approach to presentation that heralded the kinds of interplay the Surrealists subjected their chosen objects to. Twenty-four works by Man Ray were surrounded by forty Oceanic objects and twenty-one Indonesian pieces. The preface to the brochure that accompanied the exhibition featured a succession of quotations by various poets.

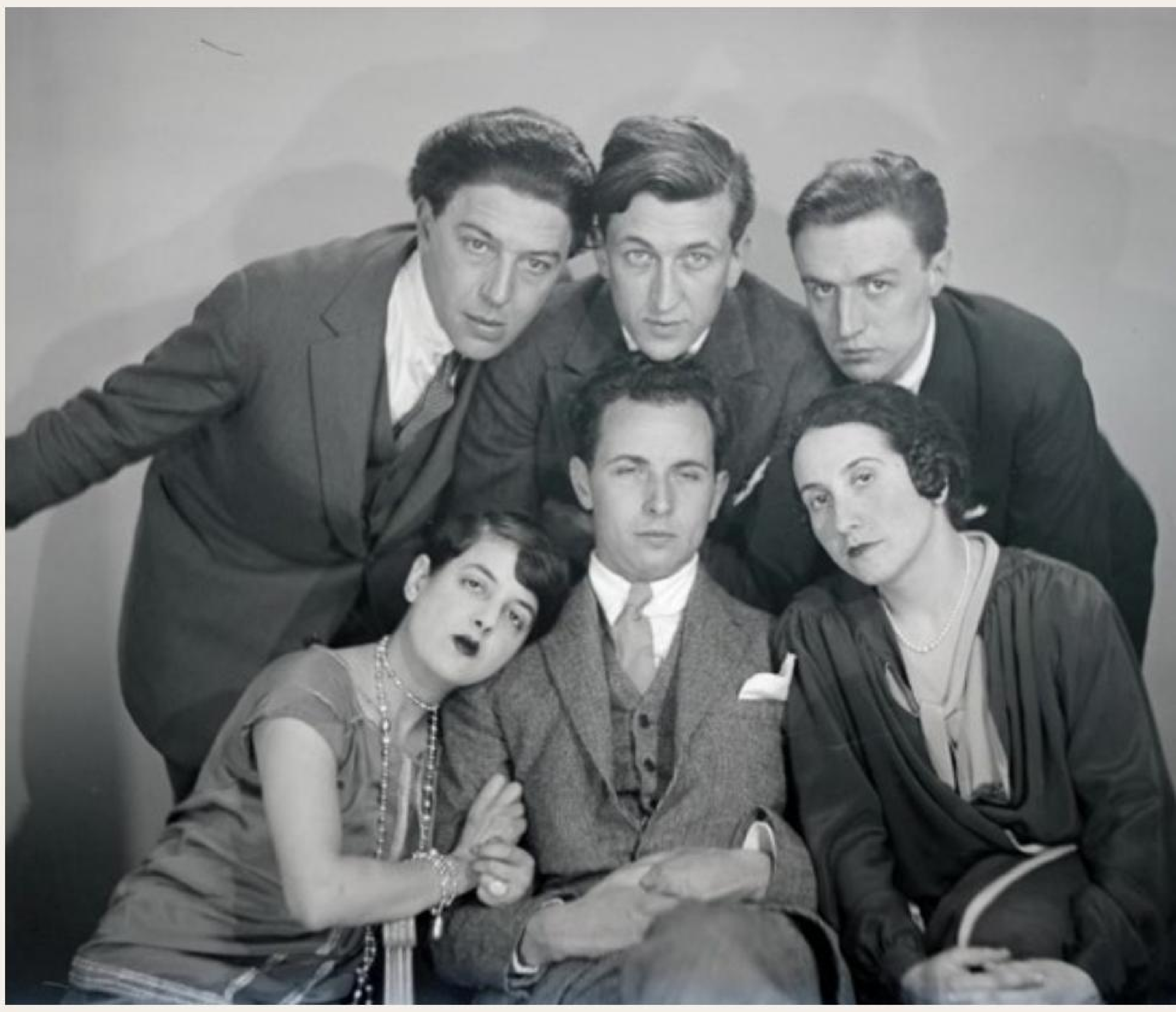
On July 28, 1926, Tual married Colette Jéramec (1896-1970), a future researcher at the Pasteur Institute, who had just divorced novelist Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893-1945). The event was immortalized by Man Ray. The witnesses were Morise and the poet Louis Aragon (1897-1982). It was also Colette who financed the first meetings of the nascent Surrealist movement, maintaining regular correspondence with the artistic world of the time. After separating from Tual in 1932, she remarried in 1937 to Paul Tchernia (1905-1986), an oceanographer working at the Musée de l'Homme.

As they began to appear in public sales, particularly between 1925 and 1931, Pre-Columbian art objects acquired a new status. Tual was not insensitive to this. In 1927, it was the arts of the Americas' turn to be honored at the Galerie Surréaliste with the *Yves Tanguy et Objets d'Amérique* exhibition, a side-by-side presentation of the surrealist artist's paintings along with Pre-Columbian objects from Peru and Mexico, some Northwest Coast Indian pieces and a *katsina* doll from New Mexico, from the collections of Aragon, Breton, Paul Éluard (1895-1952), Tual and Nancy Cunard (1896-1965), among others.

Tual was subsequently also among the lenders to the *Les arts anciens de l'Amérique* exhibition*,* organized by Georges Henri Rivière (1897-1985) and Alfred Métraux (1902-1963), at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (May 12 - July 1, 1928), at which fifteen of his objects were shown.

But it was Oceania that made the deepest impression on the interested Surrealist circles. Very early on, Breton, Éluard and Tual understood the importance of Oceanic cultures, whose artistic wealth they felt could one day eclipse that of the African continent, which they viewed as being devoid of poetry. Their point of view was increasingly confirmed by the art market. The years 1928-1932 saw an extremely active market for Oceanic lots at public auctions in Paris. With the dispersal of the Walter Bondy collection (1880-1940) at the Hôtel Drouot in May 1928, the first price records were reached in this field.

The Belgian magazine *Variétés* (1928-1930) devoted a special issue called *Le Surréalisme* to Oceanic art in 1929, in which it famously published a map of the "Surrealist world", as Éluard called it, in which



Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky) (1890-1976), Marriage of Roland and Colette Tual, July 28, 1926.
André Breton, Max Morise, Rolland Tual, Simone Kahn, Louis Aragon and Colette Jéramec.
Gelatin silver bromide negative on glass. 9 x 12 cm.
© Man Ray Trust, Centre Pompidou, Paris, AM 1995-281 (1100).

each geographical zone is shown in a size proportional to its artistic importance to the movement. The Pacific Ocean was placed at the center of this world, bordered by a continent-sized representation of New Guinea. By deliberately distorting the map, the Surrealists were delivering a political message opposing a conventional imperialist and Eurocentric conception of the world.

The well-known and seminal *Afrique, Océanie* exhibition organized by Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), Pierre Loeb (1897-1964) and Charles Ratton (1895-1986), was produced and seen at the Galerie Pigalle from February 27 through mid-April of 1930 in Paris. Tual contributed two important Fang figures, three Congo fetishes, a rare figure from Tanimbar, Indonesia, a house post finial (lot 8, Tual 1930, pl. III) from Papua New Guinea, a Maori footrest from New Zealand, and the Solomon Islands canoe prow ornament now in the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac (lot 40, Tual 1930, pl. III. Inv. 89.5.1).

Assembled mainly in Paris, where he frequented the well-known dealers of the period, Roland Tual's collection illustrates the taste of these early collectors very accurately. He frequented the Café du Dôme, where he met, among others, the German dealer Alfred Flechtheim (1878-1937), and perhaps also the Berlin collector and dealer Arthur Speyer II (1894-1958), a friend of dealer Ernest Ascher's (1888-1978).

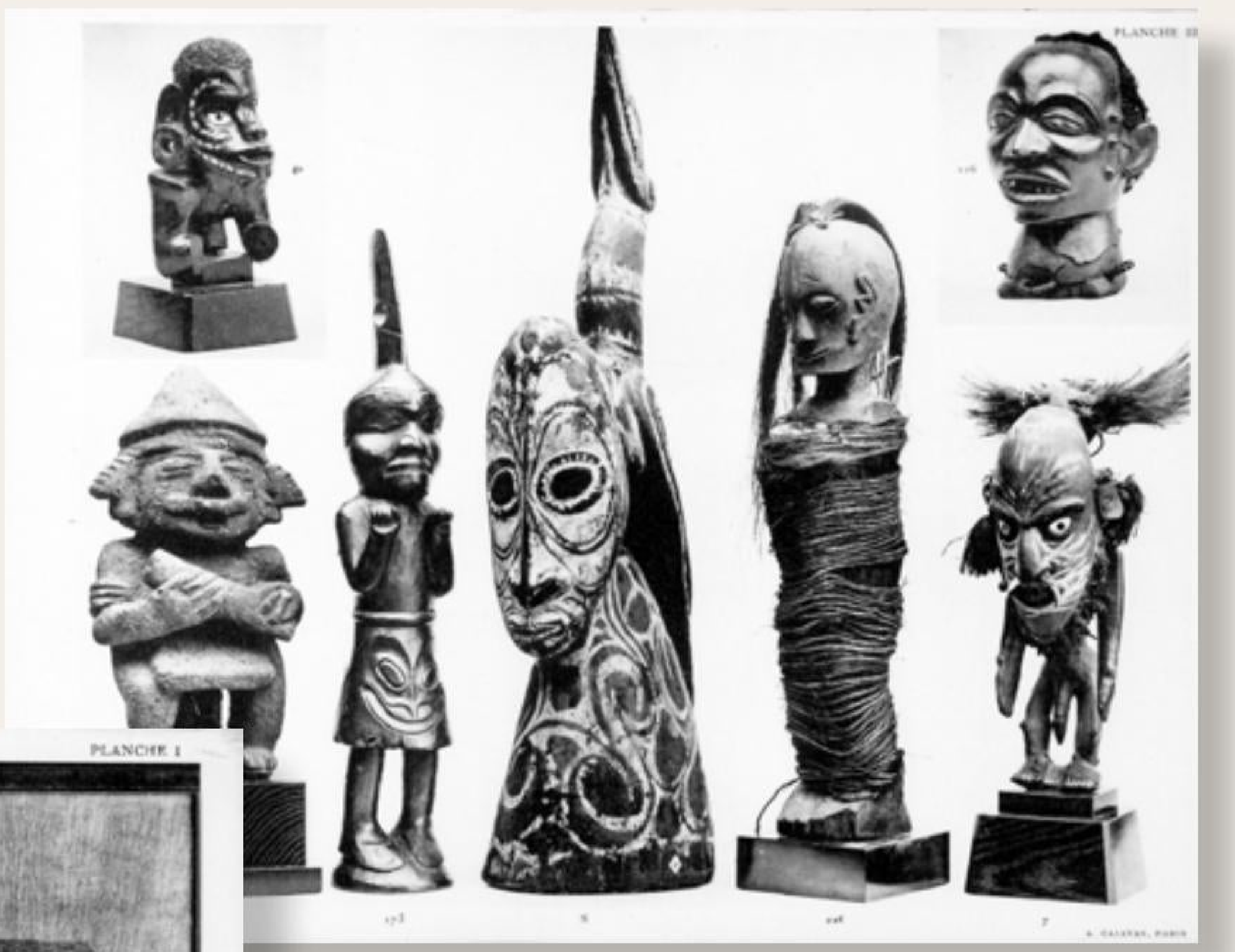
Like many artists, Breton, Éluard, Tzara and Tual were also active at public sales and auctions to add to their collections.

While Tual also collected important pieces from Africa, his Oceanic acquisitions were ultimately his most remarkable ones, as can be gleaned from the objects illustrated in the publications produced by André Portier (1886-1963) and François Poncetton (1875-1950). These pieces include a Mundugumor figure and a house post finial from Papua New Guinea (pl. III), a Leti Island (Moluccas) figure (pl. VI), a Solomon Islands canoe prow ornament (pl. XII) and a New Ireland house lintel ornament (pl. XXXIV) in *Les Arts Sauvages Océanie* (Ed. Morancé, Paris, 1929), and a shield from Papua New Guinea in *Décoration Océanienne* (A. Calavas, Paris, Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, pl. 8 (a), 1931).

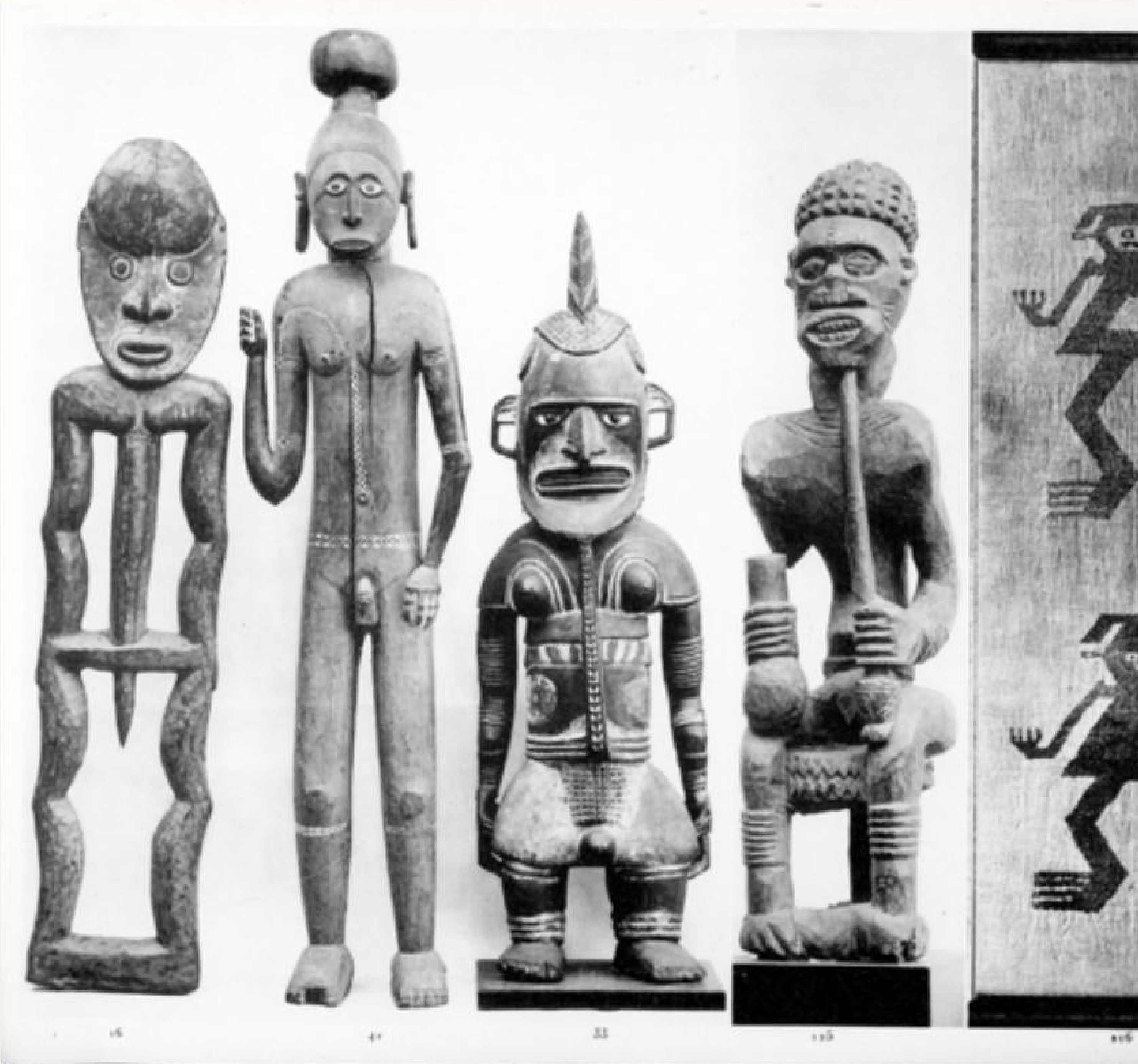
New Ireland was omnipresent in the Surrealist imagination. In 1964, the *uli* figure from the former Tual collection (Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet), which Breton had been unable to obtain at the time of the Tual sale in 1930, was once again on the market. Breton did not hesitate to part with an important painting by Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) in order to acquire it, and it was to its glory that, in 1948, he wrote his famous poem, "Uli", published in the catalog of the *Océanie* exhibition at the Galerie Andrée Olive.

On December 18, 1936, Tual married his second wife Denise Piazza (1906-2000), whose first husband had been Pierre Batcheff (1901-1932), the lead actor in the short film *Un chien andalou* (1929) directed by Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1900-1983) and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989). She rubbed shoulders with many of the great names of French and international surrealism and was often photographed by Man Ray.

By the 1930s, she had already entered the world of cinema through editing, and it was with her that Tual developed his interest in film, founding the production company Synops in 1936. Later, Denise founded Sepic (Société d'études pour l'industrie cinématographique). Her first film, *Le Lit à Colonnes* (1942), an extravagant and dreamlike tale based on a screenplay by Louise de Vilmorin (1902-1969), was one of the biggest hits of the occupation years in France.



Roland Tual auction catalog, Lair Dubreuil and André Portier, Hôtel Drouot, February 9-11, Paris, 1930. Pl. III.



Roland Tual auction catalog, Lair Dubreuil and André Portier, Hôtel Drouot, February 9-11, Paris, 1930. Pl. I.

For over a decade, Tual produced some of the most influential works in French cinema, including André Malraux's *Espoir-Sierra de Teruel* (1938-1939), Jean Renoir's *La Bête Humaine* (1938), Jacques Feyder's *La Loi du Nord* (1939) and Jean Grémillon's *Remorques* (1941). In 1943, Tual met Albert Camus (1913-1960) at Gallimard, where they both became jurors on the panel that awarded his prestigious but short-lived Prix de La Pléiade. In 1950, Roland, Denise and Werner Malbran (1900-1980) made a collectively produced film called *Ce siècle a cinquante ans (Days of Our Years)*. It was the last movie that Tual was involved in creating. He and his wife owned a small country house in Orsay, where they enjoyed entertaining in the company of Christian Dior (1905-1957), the new talent in fashion, theater decorator Christian Bérard (1902-1949), author Marcel Achard, and photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue (1894-1986).

Tual's early death deprived French cinema of one of its most original personalities. André Breton himself was captivated by the dazzling intelligence of this man who never denied his Surrealist inspiration. His name remains closely associated with one of the first major collections dedicated to non-Western art, as evidenced by the catalog for the auction of his pieces at the Hôtel Drouot on February 10 and 11, 1930. 63 lots from Oceania, 51 from Africa, 56 from the Americas and 14 from Indonesia were offered for sale there. Little is known about many facets of Tual's life, and we will probably never know the reasons why he decided to part with this remarkable ensemble of objects. The six illustrated plates in the catalog clearly demonstrate what a discerning eye and universal curiosity this major figure on the European cultural scene in the early 20th century had.

Kichizô Inagaki (1876-1951)

By Philippe Bourgoin

Between the 1860s and the beginning of the 20th century, Europe underwent a real revolution with the advent of the fashion of Japonisme. The movement was responsible for motivating Japanese sculptor Kichizô Inagaki to come to Paris on July 20, 1906.

Inagaki was born in the town of Murakami in Niigata Prefecture on the island of Honshu in Japan. His father was a renowned craftsman in the imperial court, well-known for his abilities in the areas of lacquer work and ikebana floral arrangement. Inagaki won second place in a sculpture competition in 1894, third prize at the national contest for master lacquer workers in 1899 and obtained his degree from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts where he joined the stone sculpture and modeling workshops in 1904.

After a stay in Hong Kong, Inagaki settled in Paris at 10 rue Nouvelle du Théâtre, not far from his studio at number 7 (now rue Georges-Citerne, in the 15th arrondissement), which was home to a community of Japanese artists. During this period, he eked out his living by selling small wooden animal sculptures on the sidewalks. He soon made a name for himself with his masterful woodworking and his activities as a base and pedestal maker. He did precision work using precious woods. His pedestals, which are characterized by the use of mortise-and-tenon joints, are recognizable by their shape, their splayed corners, their distinctive finish with a light graining, and his artist's name "Yoshio" usually stamped on the underside of the base.

The famous Hungarian-born art dealer and collector Joseph Brummer (1883-1947), who together with his brothers Ernest (1891-1964) and Imre (1889-1928), opened a Paris gallery in 1906, selling African sculptures, Japanese prints, and Pre-Columbian art as well as contemporary art, was one of Inagaki's first customers. Many other clients followed, including Paul Guillaume (1891-1934), Louis Carré (1897-1977) and Béla Hein (1883-1931). 84 of the 123 African works acquired mainly from the dealer Paul Guillaume by Albert C. Barnes (1872-1951) in Philadelphia between 1922 and 1924, were mounted and based by Inagaki.

The artist also collaborated with one of his compatriots, sculptor-lacquerer Seizô Sugawara (1884-1937), who came to Paris in 1905 to teach the art of lacquer to goldsmith Lucien Gaillard (1861-1942), and in 1912 also introduced the great Art Deco proponent Jean Dunand (1877-1942) to the technique. From 1910 onwards, Sugawara worked with and for the Irish Modern Movement decorator and designer Eileen Gray (1878-1976), joined in 1918 by Inagaki, with whom he created remarkable unsigned furniture and furniture pieces for her until 1922. Sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), an avid collector of antiques, succumbed, like many contemporary artists, to the Japonisme craze, and established relationships with many young Japanese artists. In 1912, on the recommendation of Jokichi Naïto (1879-1954), an instructor at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, he recruited the Japanese cabinetmaker to make wooden frames for his Egyptian reliefs. Inagaki also collaborated with couturier-decorator Paul Poiret (1879-1944), for whom he made the *Nuit de Chine* perfume box in around 1920.

In 1914, Inagaki married Laure Peltre, with whom he had two children (René and Simone), and became a naturalized French citizen in 1924. His son René (1915-1940), enlisted in the Second World War, was lost on board the battleship *Bretagne*, which sunk during the British attack in the harbor of Mers-EL-Kébir on July 3, 1940.

Kichizô Inagaki portrait.
© Private collection (*Tribal Art Magazine*, #66, Winter 2012).

An artist with many and diverse talents, Kichizô Inagaki revolutionized the art of base making. His name is still little known to the general public, but for art lovers, an Inagaki base or pedestal is the hallmark of a quality work that once had a place of pride in a prestigious collection.

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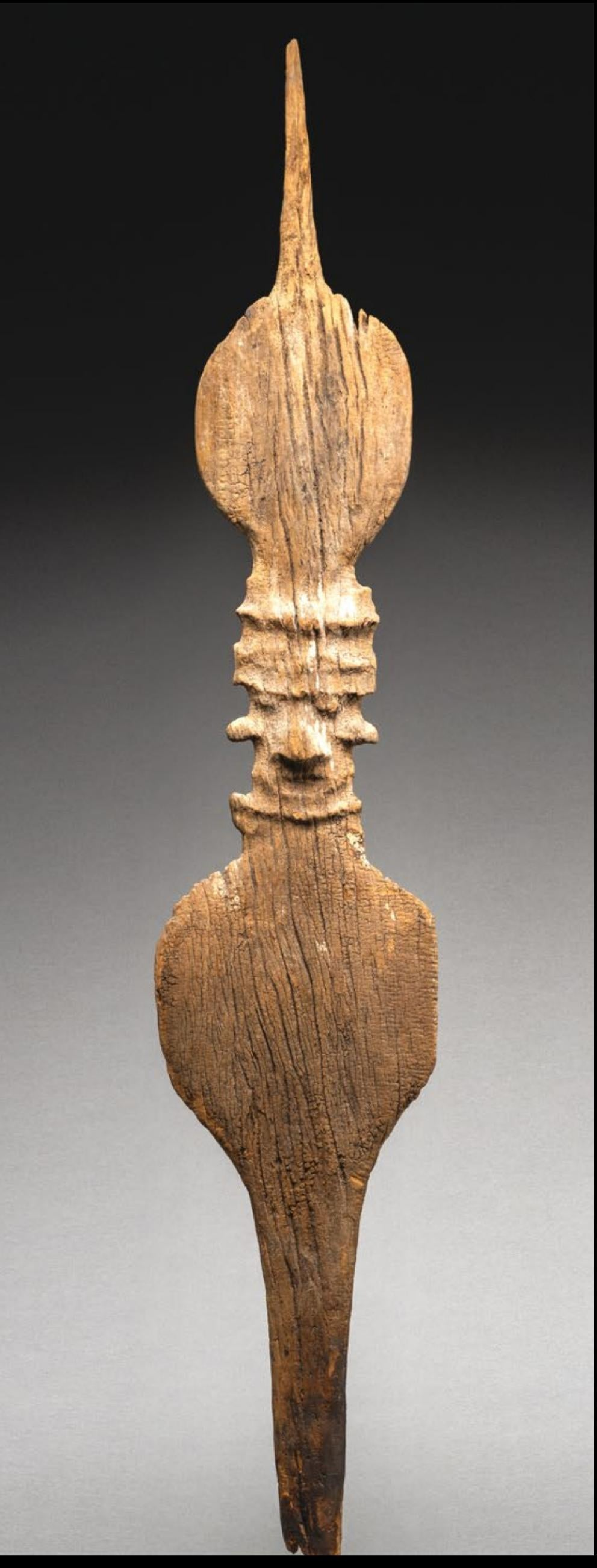


11 New Caledonia Roof Spire, *gomoa*

Kanak culture, New Caledonia
Beverly Hills private collection, acquired in the 1960s
Douglas W. Morse, Pasadena
19th century
61 ¼" (155.5 cm) in height

These New Caledonia roof spires were carved knowing they would be spending decades exposed to the elements, which might explain how hauntingly beautifully these objects age and weather.

The New Caledonian Roof Spire

By Philippe Bourgoin

The first Western accounts of the Kanak world were given by Englishman Captain James Cook (1728-1779) and were followed by those of Frenchman Antoine Bruny d'Entrecasteaux (1737-1793), whose expedition reached New Caledonia while searching for French navigator Jean-François de La Pérouse (1741-1788). The latter's ships, *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe*, had disappeared between 1788 and 1789. Cook arrived in Balade, on the northern part of the island he had just named New Caledonia, on September 5, 1774, while d'Entrecasteaux, with his two ships *La Recherche* and *L'Espérance*, also dropped anchor in the harbor of Balade, but some nineteen years later, on April 21, 1793.

The first Kanak objects, including the famous roof spires, found their way into European collections as a result of these visits. Today, it is difficult to see any roof spires in situ, as most of the Grandes Cases (Great Houses) they adorned disappeared in the 1920s. Traditional Kanak settlements were made up of several huts housing members of one or more families, aligned in a strictly established arrangement based on kinship or order of arrival, along an alley lined with tall trees, coconut palms, or columnar pines.

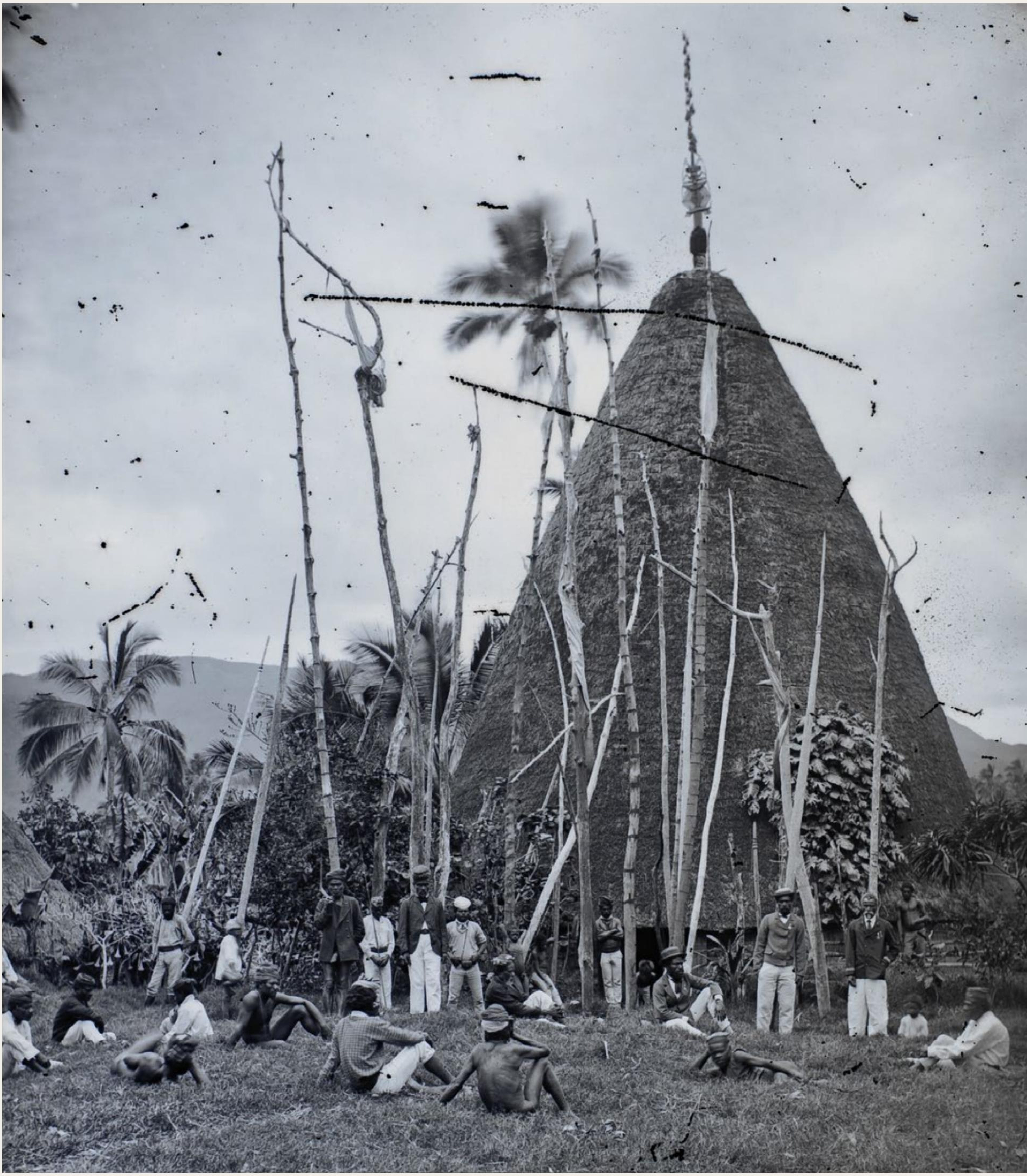
The Grande Case (Great House) at the end of this alley had a name that referred both to the place and to the family group that claimed it as their own. The presence of the ceremonial alley, where the most important events in the life of the community unfolded implied, in addition to the distribution of dwellings, a set of rules that applied to moving through it.

The Great House, the central structure of important chiefdoms, was a sacred space where the clan gathered around its leader and where the laws of men, inspired by the wisdom of the elders, were made and decided. Its architectural form symbolized society. The central pole represented the chief or elder, who served as a link to the world of the ancestors, who in turn advised him on how to guide the destiny of the tribe. The poles, symbols of the clans, remained autonomous but radiated with the elder, while the other elements represented individuals and their rank, and the circular shape of the Great House symbolized harmony and equality in exchange.

Its construction required the mobilization of a large number of people, and only a few highly renowned chiefs were able to assemble sufficient manpower and the necessary resources to erect one. Although this work was mainly carried out by men, it also required the contributions of women, who were responsible for collecting roofing materials.

This task of building a Great House, which could take three or four seasons to complete, was undertaken during the time of year when yams were not being cultivated. The calendar, based on the lunar cycle, also took into account the agricultural planning needed to ensure the feeding of the workers and to prepare the gifts that would be given during the major celebrations (*pilou*) held on certain occasions. The most sought-after wood for the construction of important buildings, the hulls of long catamarans, and major sculptures was that of the giant Houp tree (*Montrouziera cauliflora*), due to its density and, more particularly, to its durability and its ability to resist the elements.

This stately tree grows only at high altitudes, in the primeval forests of the central mountain range. Men would cut it down, transport it, and transform it after performing the necessary rituals and observing the various prohibitions governing the undertaking, since it was revered as a living entity, much like a great



Hughan, Allan (1834-1883), *Meeting House in Canala*. 1874. New Caledonia.
We see the great chief Gélima (c. 1825-1895) standing and in uniform on the right.

Collodion negative on glass plate, 16.5 x 21.5 cm.
Ex-coll. Maurice Leenhardt (1878-1954).
© Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac. Inv. 2002-5554-B.

chief. A symbol of power at the heart of the clans' socio-cultural, political, and religious activities, the Great House was always topped with a ridgepole sculpture - a roof spire - which displayed its creators' great concern for balance, elegance, and dynamism.

This emblem, representing the ancestor and symbolizing the clan, was both the most important and the most functional of all the sculptures that adorned the Great House. Its installation marked the completion of the building's construction. Indeed, the finishing work at the top of the roof was a delicate operation on which the structure's waterproofing depended. It involved tightening the last row of straw bundles around a central axis, either directly around the end of the central post or against the base of a spire that was aligned with, and inserted into, the central post.

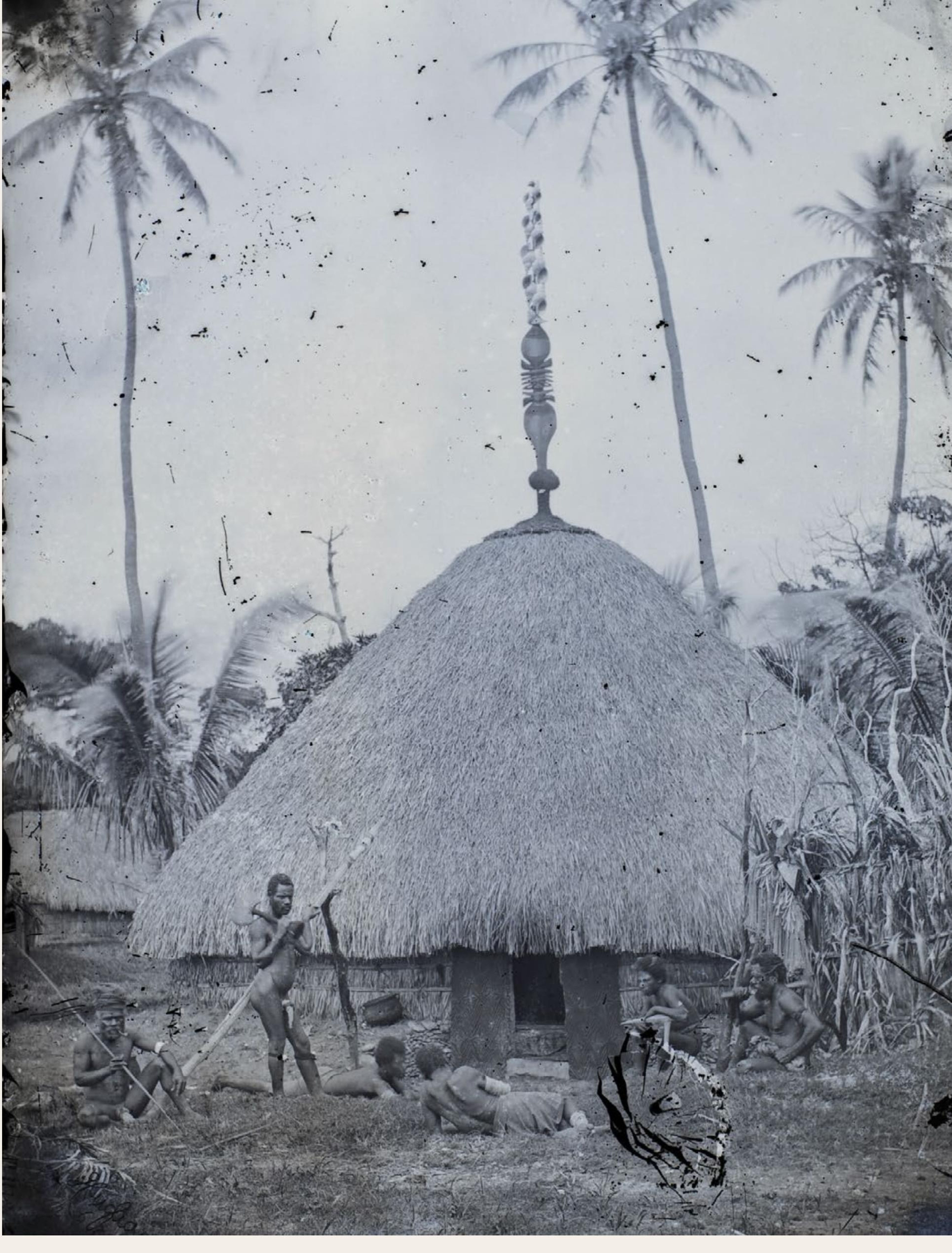
Depending on the circumstances and the importance of the person for whom it was intended, this sculpture was commissioned by the elders, either from a sculptor who was a member of their clan or from a close ally, or from a renowned sculptor from elsewhere who was invited to come to create it. This insignia was presented to the oldest member of the chief's lineage by the oldest clans, which is to say by those who considered themselves the original autochthonous people and founders of the country.

The great honor of installing the spire was accorded to a maternal uncle. The spire also evoked the deceased chief, serving as a kind of substitute for his corpse, while the central aisle between the huts represented the passage between the world of the dead and that of the living. The spire was removed when the elder brother died and was replaced by his successor. On some occasions, spires were ritually damaged, struck with an axe, or even destroyed during certain rites. They were then left in place in this state or sometimes taken away but not reused.

During mourning, the highest-placed shell containing protective herbs was the target of slingshots or rifle shots aimed at it by the warriors of the maternal clans. This connection with the deceased was also evidenced by the traditional practice of hoisting the body of the deceased in a net to just beneath the spire, as well as by the presence of roof spires in some cemeteries.

The issue of styles in New Caledonia is complex. Even though it is possible to identify fairly homogeneous and clearly differentiated regional styles, information gathered in the field and old photographs shows that different styles could coexist within the same area. Traditional trade and travel routes carried sculptors and sculptures from valley to valley, following family ties. There are many cases in which the supposed origin of the sculptures is contradicted by their place of collection. While there is thus a wide range of variations, the roof spires are based on an archetype whose different forms can be grouped into five styles that can be attributed to relatively precise geographical areas. These were defined by Maurice Leenhardt (1878-1954) (*Notes d'ethnologie néo-calédonienne*, Institut d'ethnologie, tome VIII, Paris, 1930) and subsequently revisited by Jean Guiart (1925-2019) (*L'art autochtone de Nouvelle Calédonie*, Editions des études mélanésiennes, New Caledonia, 1953):

Northern style: Voh, Koumac, Hienghène and Balade
Paicî language area style: Koné, Ponerihouen, Poindimié and Touho
Houaïlou style: Bourail, Poya and Houaïlou
Canala style: Païta, Bouloupari, La Foa, Thio and Canala
Southern style: Ile des Pins, Yaté, Touaourou and Nouméa



Hughan, Allan (1834-1883). *The Pothe tribe*. Tournois collection. 1874. Bourail, New Caledonia.

Gelatin-silver bromide positive colored on glass plate, 8.5 x 10 cm. © Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac. Inv. PV0062666.

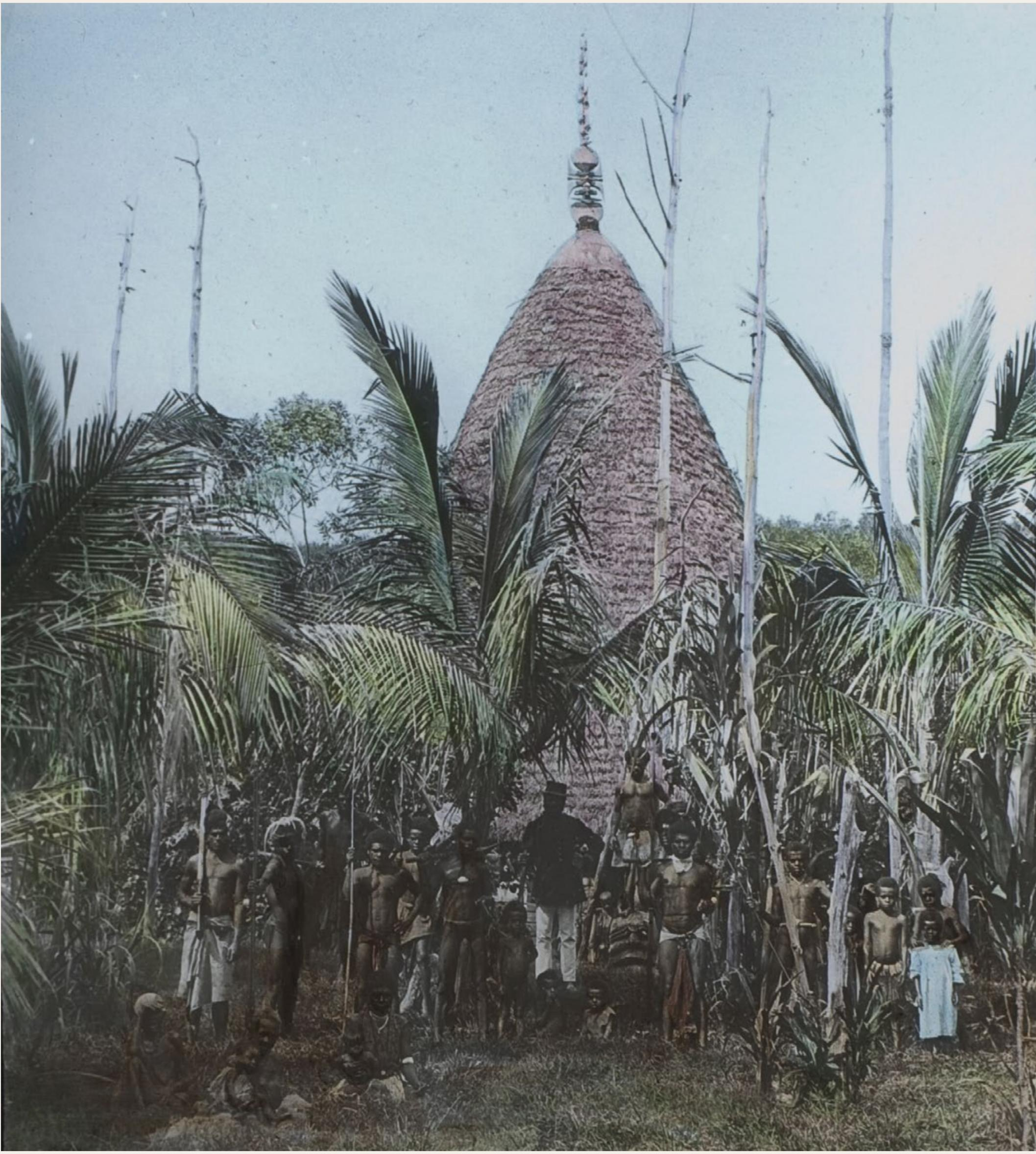
As collected spires were usually sawn off at the base, these spires must have originally measured between 3 and 4.5 meters in length. The spire is an elongated piece of wood, carved from a single tree trunk, and can be divided into three parts: a central design area, a needle-like tip onto which large shells were threaded from bottom to top, and a cylindrical base that allowed the spire to be inserted through and into the center of the roof. The central sculpture, most often carved in low relief, represents a human bust (hair, face, shoulders). It is surrounded by several symmetrical appendages or a geometric carved design (Canala area, La Foa, the South, and the Loyalty Islands). Roger Boulay (1943-2024) demonstrated, through his numerous studies, the transition from the geometric motif simulating the shape of a bundle of straw to the image of a face.

There are some examples of anthropomorphic roof spires that are sculpted in the round. Their origin remains uncertain, and it is believed that they were not intended for placement atop ordinary communal houses.

Erected atop a hut sometimes exceeding 12 meters in height, the roof spire ornament is always strictly frontal, and displayed to be viewed from the front, all the more so because the back of a Great House was sacred and off-limits, and visitors arrived from the bottom of the village's central alley. The pointed shaft above the main carved part of the spire was intended to hold shells (usually *Charonia tritonis* or *Murex ramosus*) strung from bottom to top. Symbols of the breath and words transmitted by the chief, sometimes erected on a branch planted in the ground at the entrance to a new hut, these ornaments were considered part of the clan's treasures. They were only hung at the time of the actual inauguration ceremony, during the night, by the clan that protected the chiefdom.

On some roof spires from the northern part of New Caledonia, the single tip was replaced by several tines arranged in a comb pattern projecting up from a panel with geometric diamond motifs on it. These tines were also used to suspend shells from, and the geometric designs on the panel were reminiscent of those engraved on the door jambs of the north-central style. In some cases, the shell ornaments were simply strung onto a single spike that constituted the only spire decoration of a Great House. The conch shell positioned at the top, with the roof facing up to the sky, symbolized the voice of the elder and the call of the clans, and contained magical preparations to protect the house and the region it represented.

The most important element that emphasized the grandeur of the Great House was the roof spire, displaying the face of the clan's founding ancestor. Its silhouette, which stood out against the sky and could be seen from afar was, like the spires of Gothic cathedrals, an invitation to spiritual elevation and aroused the awe and admiration of those who beheld it.



Hughan, Allan (1834-1883). *Untitled* [Group in front of a house], 1870-1879, New Caledonia. Collodion negative on glass plate, 16.3 x 12 cm. Ex-coll. Maurice Leenhardt (1878-1954). © Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac. Inv. PV0023691.

12 **Māori *Wahaika***

New Zealand
Igor Zorich Collection, Adelaide
Early/mid 19th century
16” (40.6 cm) in height

I love how the figure’s face emerges from the wood as if an invisible force is pulling it out from the club.

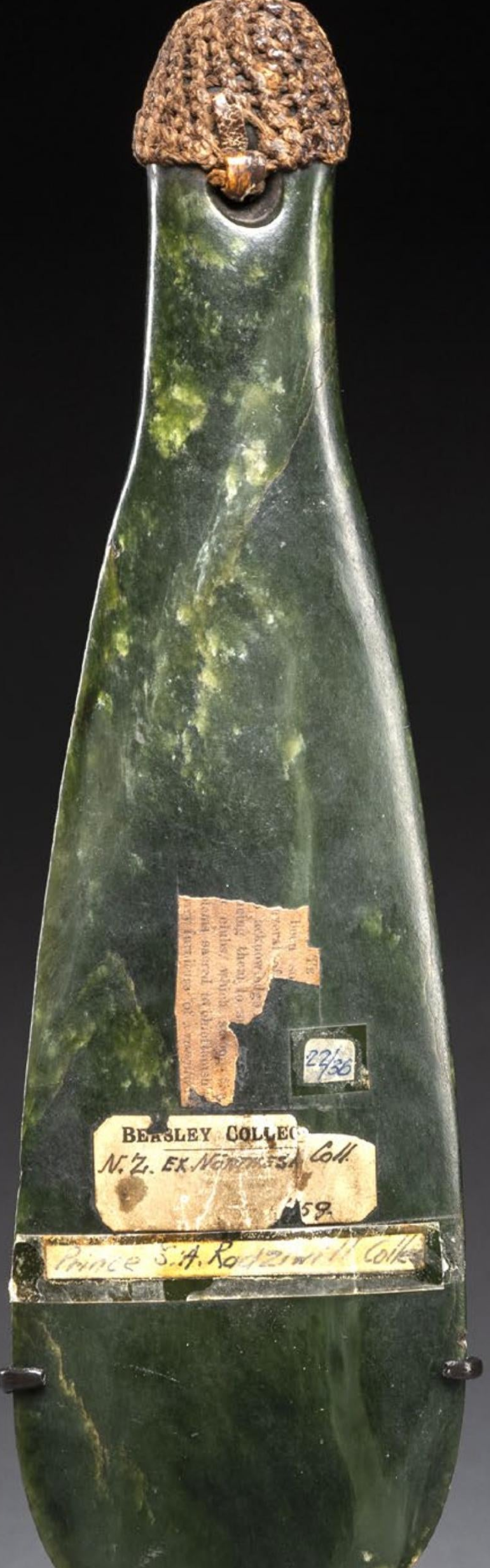
13 **Māori *Mere Pounamu***

New Zealand
Ex. Admiral William Carnegie, 7th Earl of Northesk (1756 – 1831)
By descent to Baron Rosehill, 9th Earl of Northesk (1843-1891)
Tudor House Museum, Worcester, UK
Ex. Christie, Manson & Woods auction July 14, 1924, lot 532
Harry Beasley Collection
Prince Stanislaw Albrecht Radziwill (1914-1976)
Christie's Tribal Art, London 13 July 1977, lot 60
Igor Zorich Collection, Adelaide
18th century
12 ¼" (31 cm) in height

I wish I knew as much of this Māori mere pounamu's history prior to its collection as I do about its provenance after. Imagine the lineup of Māori chief's and their heirs shoulder to shoulder with the succeeding four generations of Earl's of Northesk prior to being auctioned in 1924. Then stands the bespectacled, somewhat academic looking dealer Harry Beasley, to his right is the dashing Prince Stanislaw Radziwill, brother-in-law to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Finally stands Igor Zorich, who was born into a Russian military family in 1912 and immigrated to Australia after the Second World War where he built a successful manufacturing business and began collecting art.

There is a reason why art has a provenance while virtually everything else does not. Great art captures something enduring, and in turn becomes, in some sense, immortal. It lives beyond its owner and, as it passes through the generations, its provenance comes along for the ride with an ever-increasing influence, giving ownership its own tentacle to art's immortality.

While the art object is a discreet entity, there is a pleasure in uncovering or filling in the lost details of its provenance—by connecting that often-long tail of history that follows the object through time and place as its journey continues, inevitably, long past our own.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BEASLEY COLLEC
N.Z. EX NORTHESK Coll.
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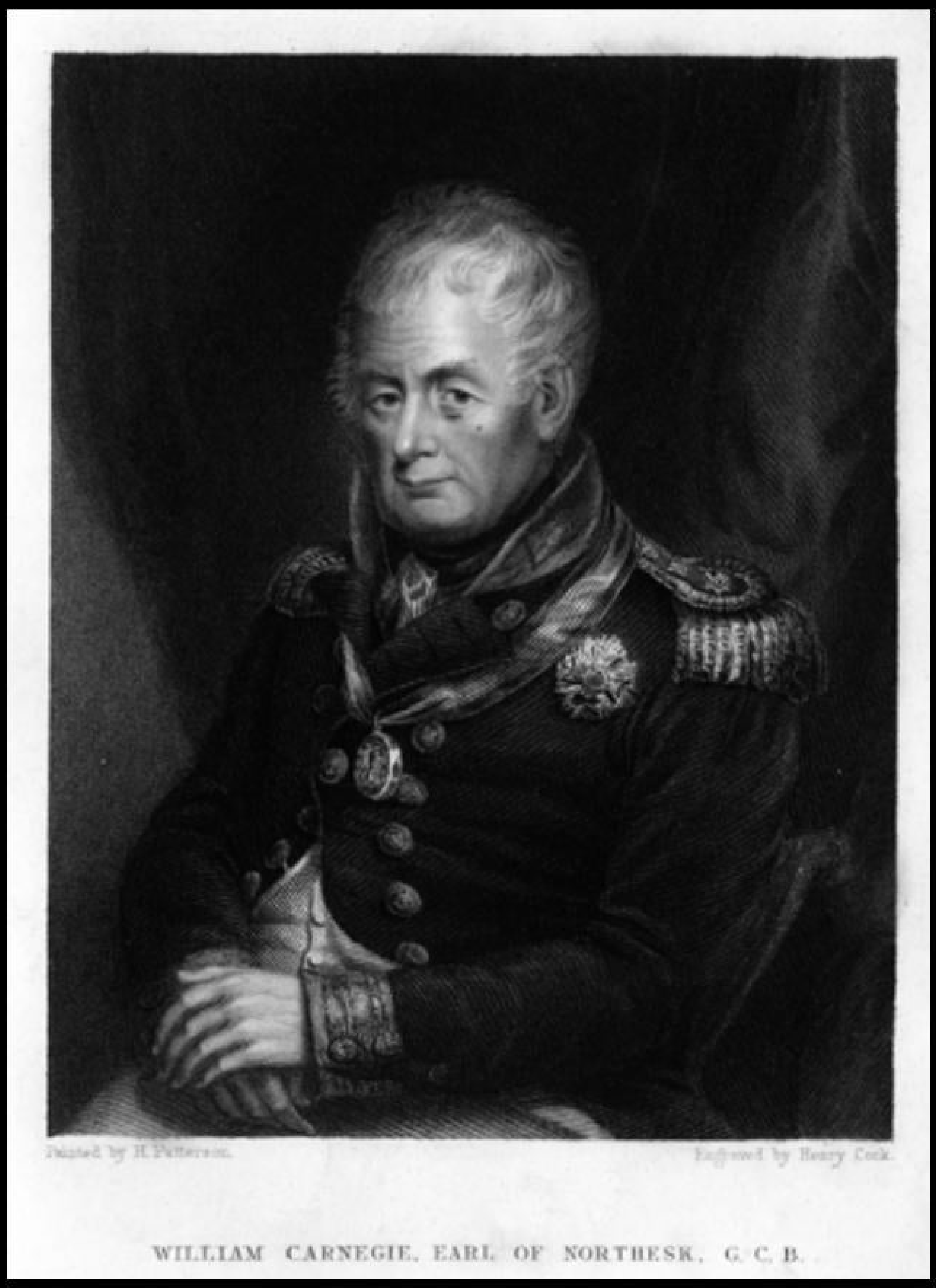
Prince S.A. Radziwill Coll.


Painted by H. Patterson.
Engraved by Henry Cook.
WILLIAM CARNEGIE, EARL OF NORTHESK, G.C.B.

Admiral William Carnegie (1756-1831), 7th Earl of Northesk, Engraving by Henry Cook 1837.

Baron Rosehill, 9th Earl of Northesk (1843-1891)

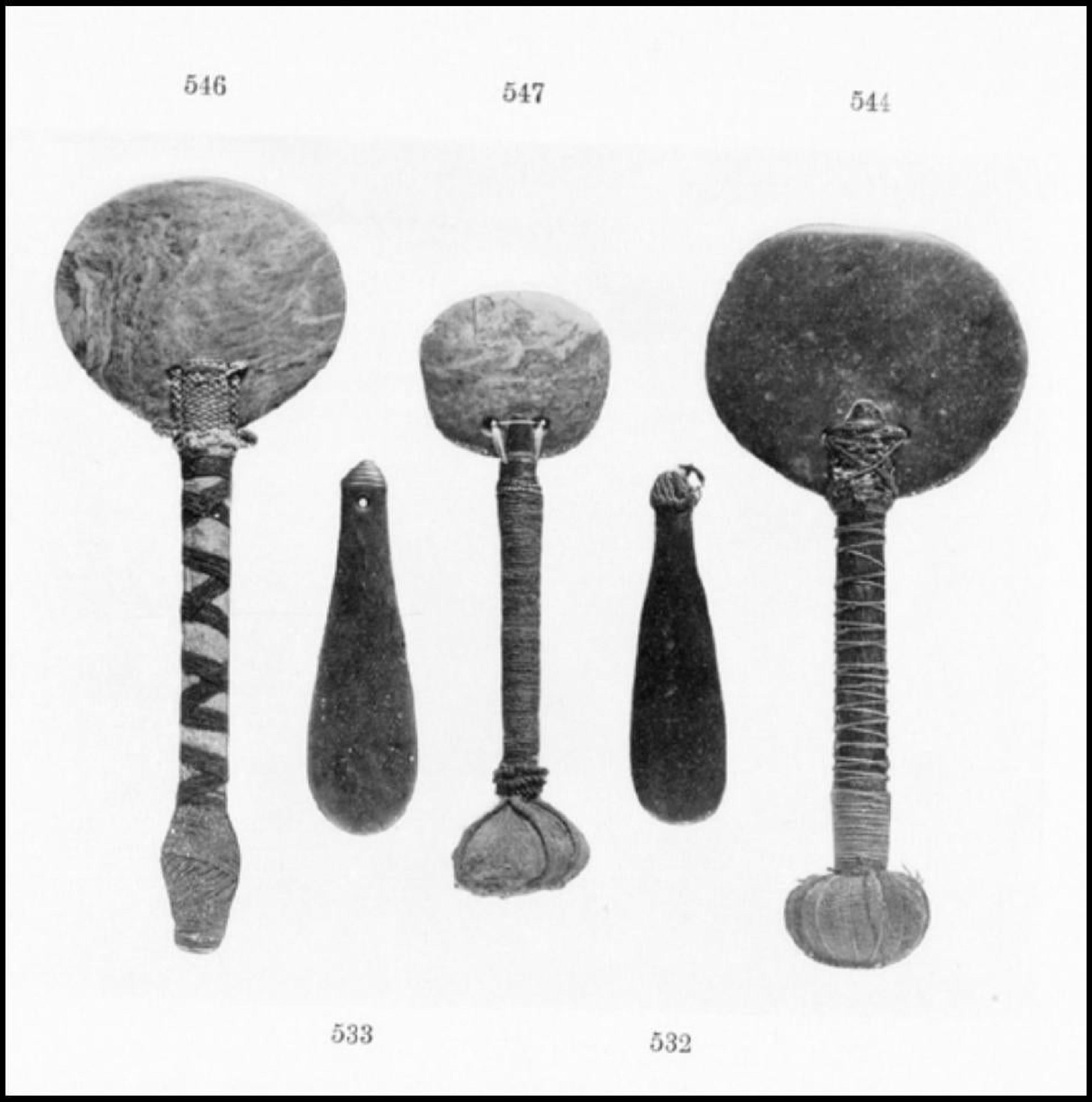

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Illustration from Christie, Manson & Woods auction catalog July 14, 1924

Prince Stanislaw Albrecht Radziwill and Jacqueline Kennedy in Ravello, Italy August 1962.

14 Māori Canoe Prow

New Zealand
Ex. Mrs. Gray of Colchester, UK
James Hooper (no. 730) purchased in December 1929 from above
Sotheby’s London, 20 May 1964, lot 38
David Rosenthal, San Francisco
Michael & Sharon Grebanier Collection, San Francisco
Early 19th century
17 ½” (44.5 cm) in height

You have to love those early British armchair collectors like Webster, Oldman, Pitt-Rivers, Beasley, and Hooper. They took their work seriously and seemed to foretell their collections’ future importance. They took good notes, kept ledgers, and crucially inscribed or labeled their objects with inventory numbers and other information. How could they have predicted both the significant role provenance would end up playing and the shabby record keeping habits of future generations of collectors?

This present Māori canoe prow is a case in point. Before I acquired it, it was said to be from the La Korrigane Expedition—the private French endeavor of 1934-36. Yet, when I checked with Christian Coiffier, the leading authority on La Korrigane and the objects collected, he found records of two Māori canoe prow—but mine was not one of them.

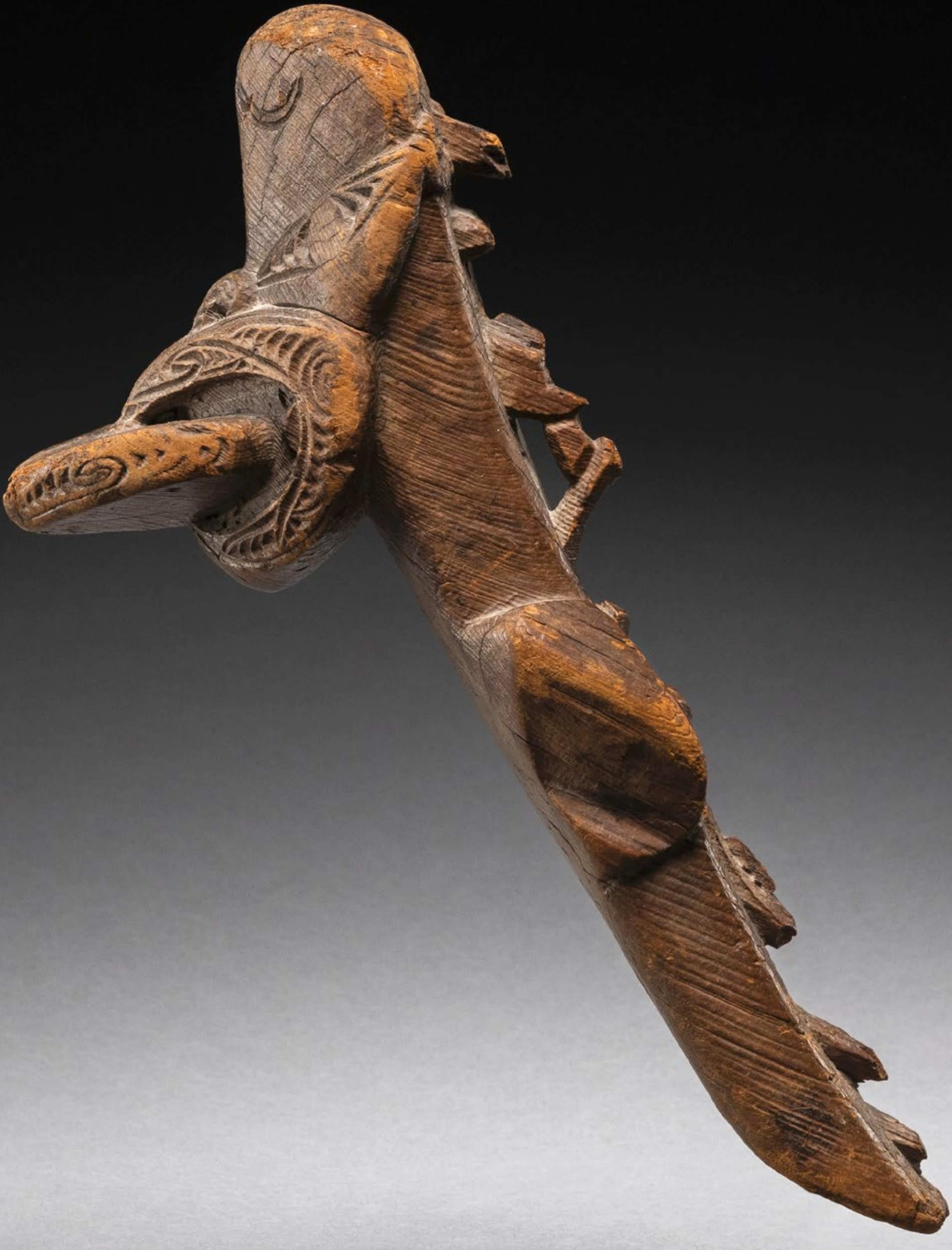
The only other clue was a very worn and partial inscription in black ink on the figure’s neck that read ‘NEW ZEALAND’, the abbreviation ‘COLL.’ and the number ‘730’ which in itself did not seem to leave any clues.

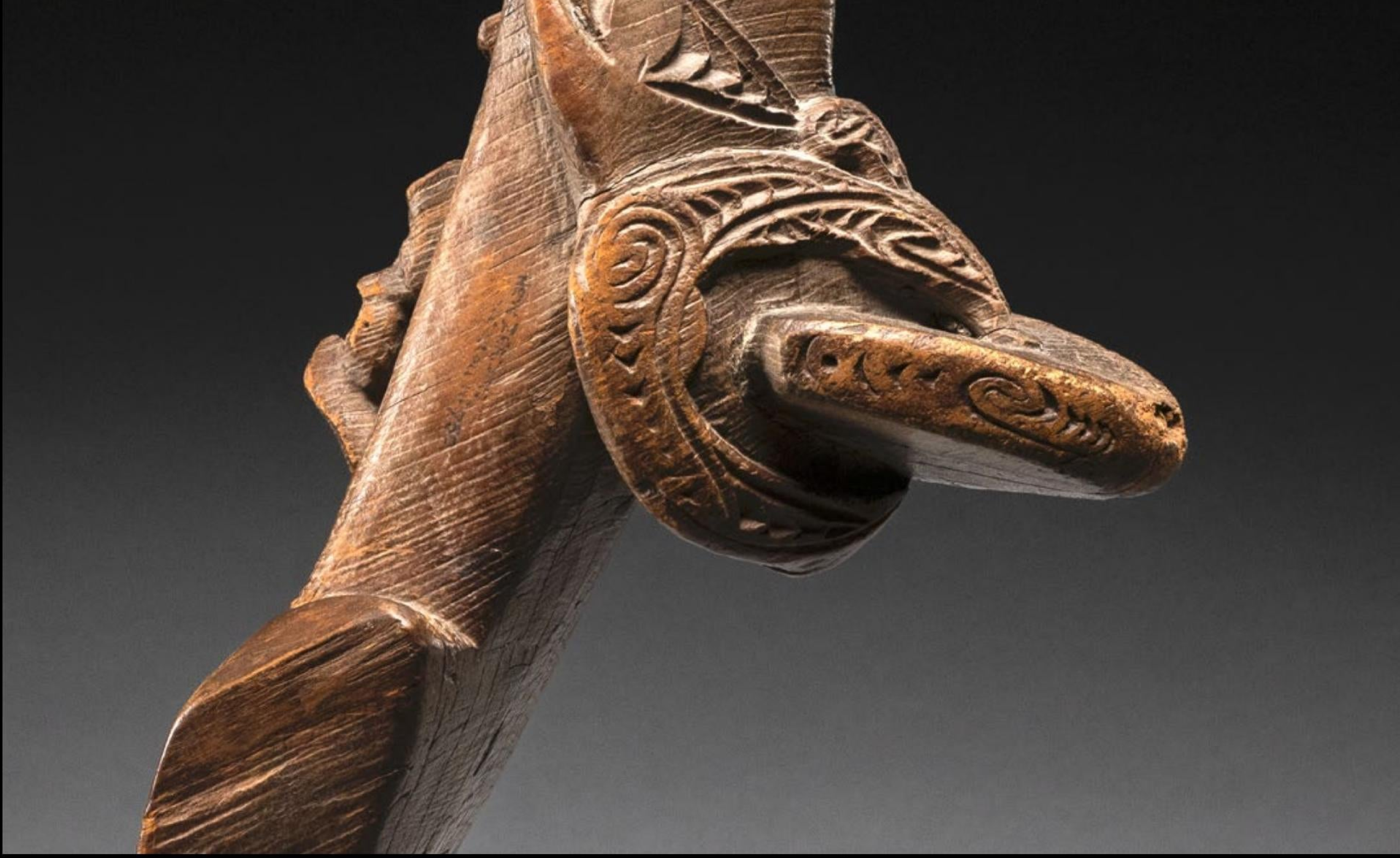
Yet, turning to the OAS Label & Inscription database—put together by our beloved late Harry Beran—I found something. While the vast majority of objects from the James Hooper Collection were renumbered after his death by his grandson Steven Phelps (now Hooper) for the book “Art and Artifacts of the Pacific, Africa and the Americas: The James Hooper Collection” using a specific system such as ‘H.1062’. But during his life James Hooper had used a different inscription format with the geographic area in all-caps as in ‘NEW ZEALAND’ followed by ‘COLL.’ along with a very distinct No. similar to what was visible on my Māori canoe prow. Could my Māori canoe prow be from the Hooper Collection?

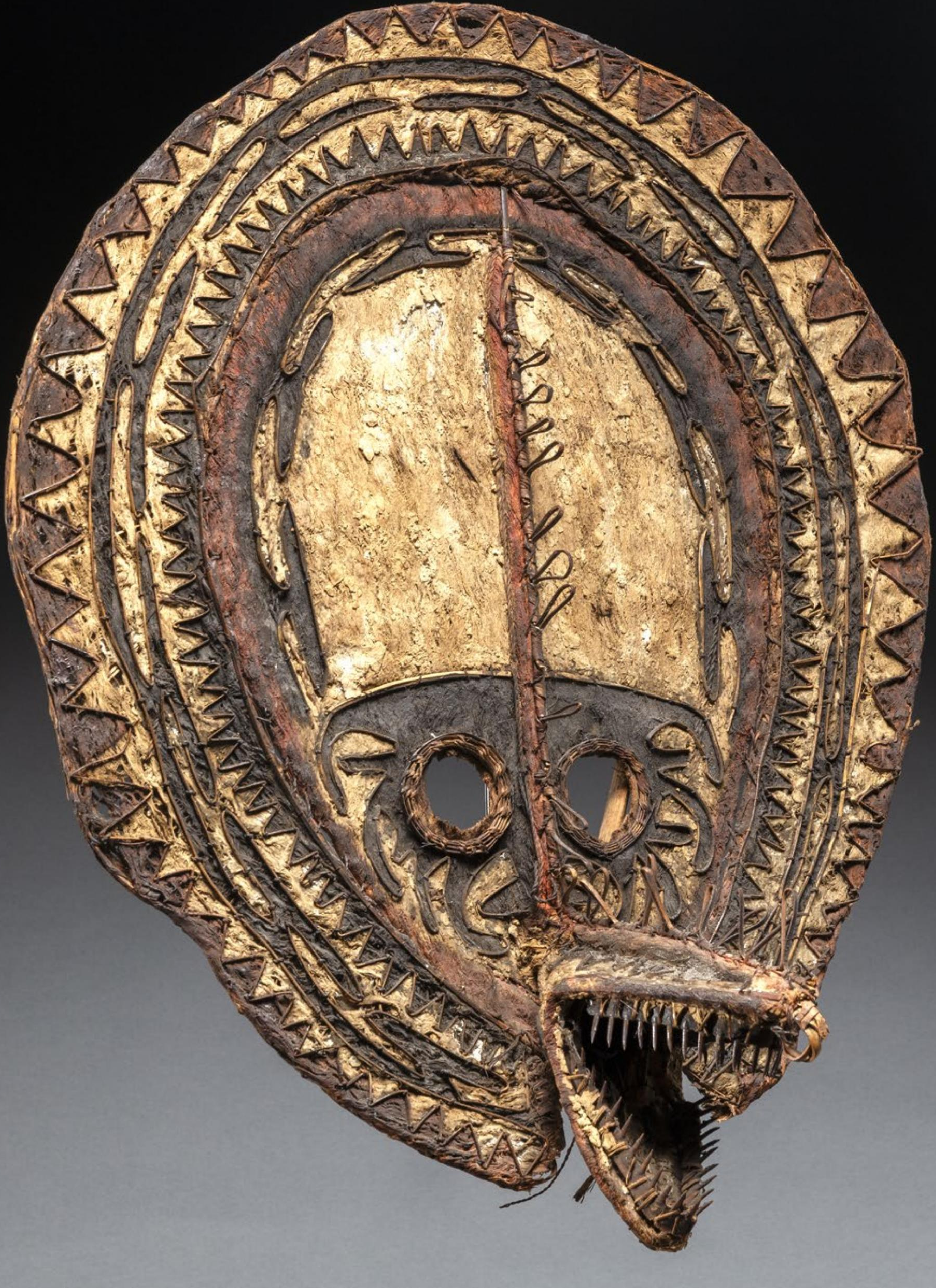
Yes, it could.

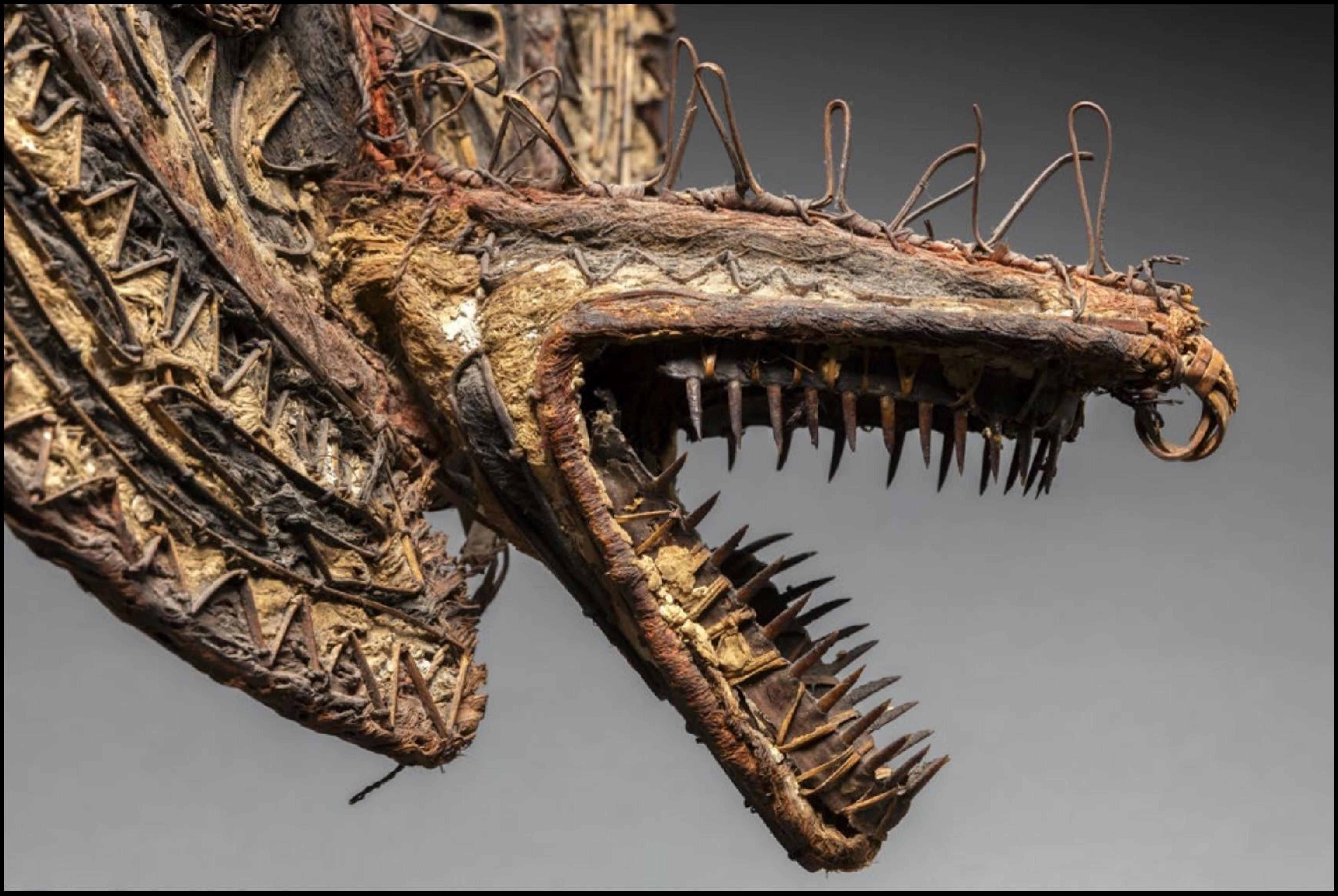
Hermione Waterfield had copies of James Hooper’s ledgers and was able to find No. 730—a Māori canoe prow with a “protruding tongue” purchased in late 1929/early 1930 from a Mrs. Gray of Colchester.

Mystery solved. But who was Mrs. Gray and how did she end up with a Māori canoe prow…





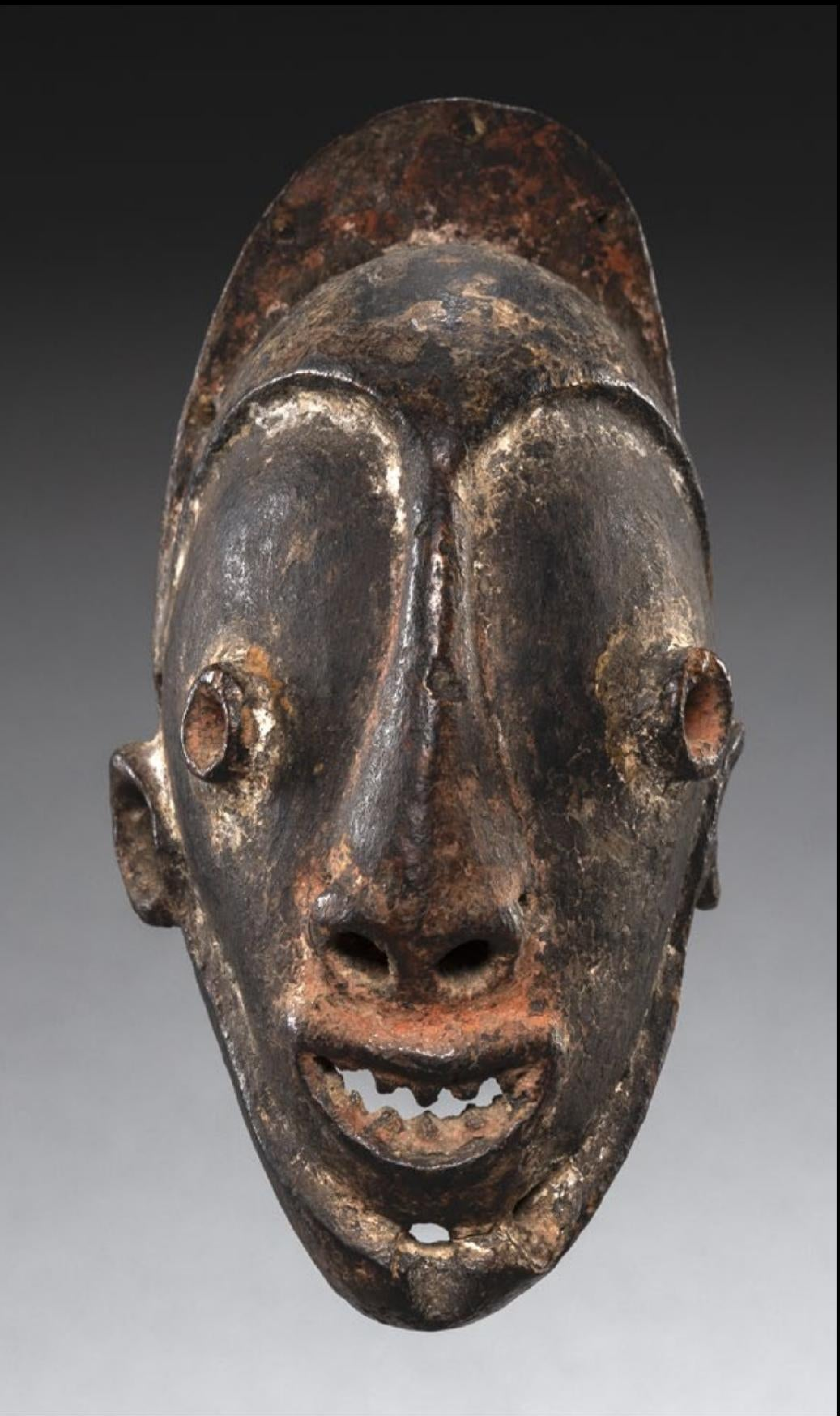




15 Papuan Gulf Tapa Mask, *Kanipu*

Purari Delta area, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea
Ex. Washington, D.C. estate
Bruce Moore Collection, Belvedere, CA
Illustrated in *The Elegance of Menace: Aesthetics of New Guinea Art*, Michael Hamson, 2006, pages 84/85
Michael Hamson Oceanic Art, Paris 2018, no. 19, pages 60/61
Late 19th century
25” (63.5 cm) in height

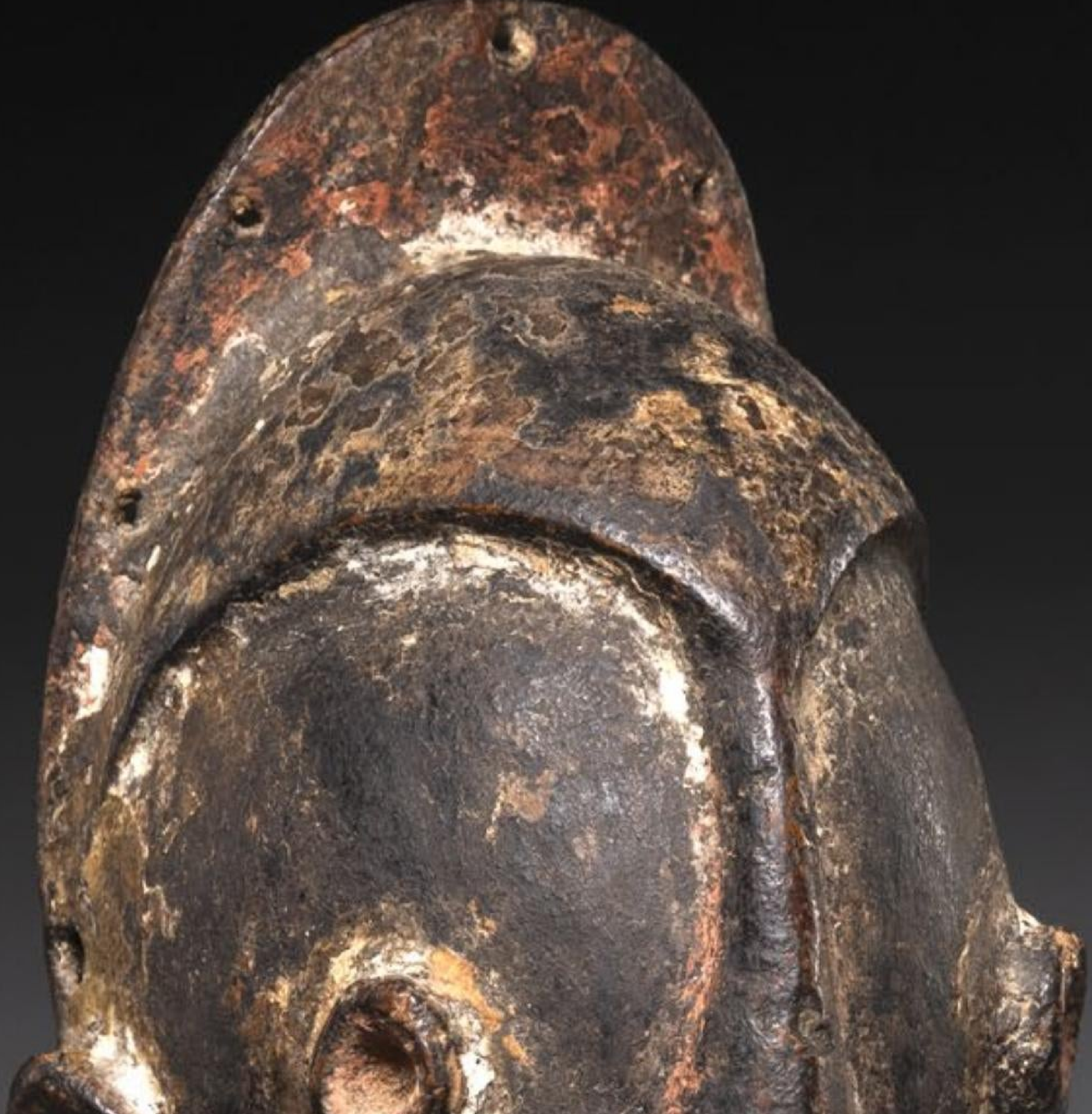
Judging from the workmanship, style, and the aggressive expression, I consider this one of the earliest *kanipu* masks. In *Art Styles of the Papuan Gulf,* Douglas Newton notes that “*kanipu* are used to enforce a *tabu* on coconuts that will be used in feasts, and the wearer haunts the groves bearing arms” (Newton, 1961, p. 23). Of the existing *kanipu* masks, I have never encountered one so menacing.

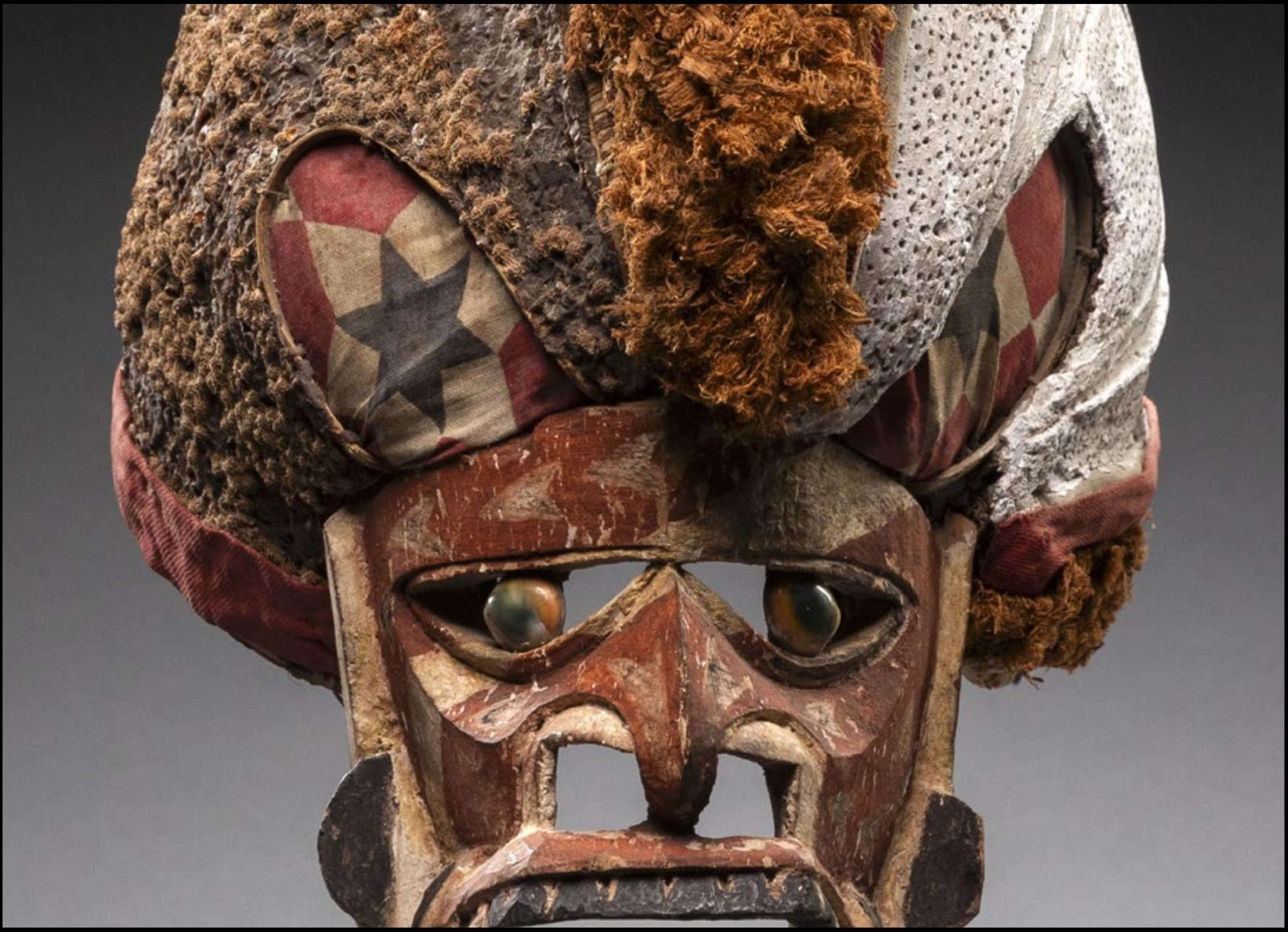


16 Yangoru Boiken Yam Mask

Yangoru Boiken area, Prince Alexander Mountains,
East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Ex. Chris Boylan Collection, Sydney
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
6 5/8” (16.8 cm) in height

This is what Oceanic art is all about. This small Boiken mask distills the essence of New Guinea art—the spiritual intensity, the raw emotive power, the patina and layers of magical pigments from generations of ritual use. The mask radiates a living, breathing threat—like the hot breath of predator inches from your face.

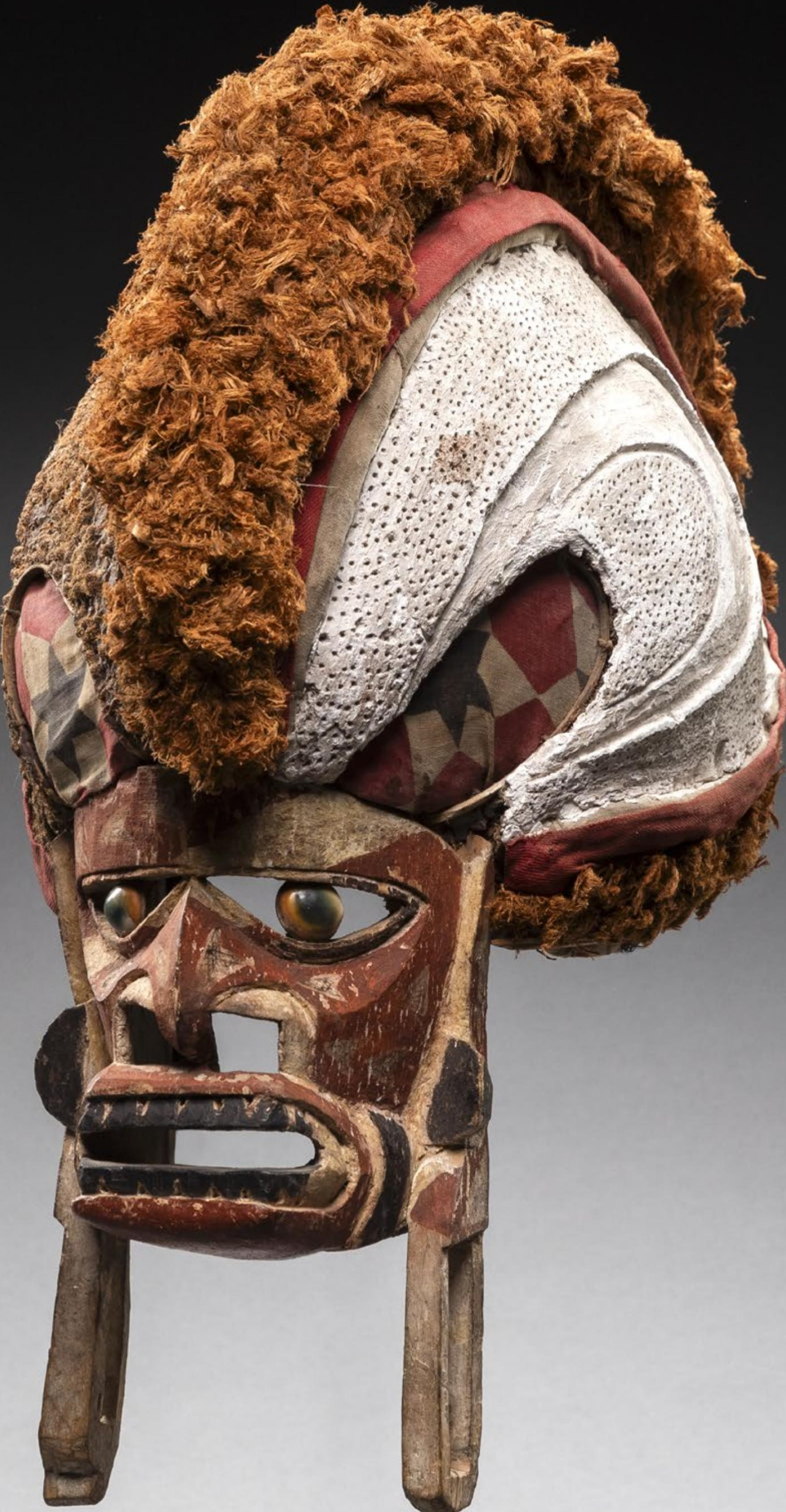




17 New Ireland *Tatanua* Mask

New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea
St. Louis private collection
Late 19th/early 20th century
17 ¾” (45 cm) in height

Because the tall crests of New Ireland *tatanua* masks are so spectacular and dominant on the piece, it is hard not to photograph them in profile. But I really love the face on this tatanua mask for its unusually airy feel with open mouth, eyes, and broad nostrils conveying the empty space behind. The scalloped cheeks are also unusual and reveal the hand of a truly gifted artist.



18 Upper Keram River Flute Mask

Rao culture area, Upper Keram River/Middle Ramu River, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea
Queensland Australia collection
Late 19th/early 20th century
22 ½” (57.1 cm) in height

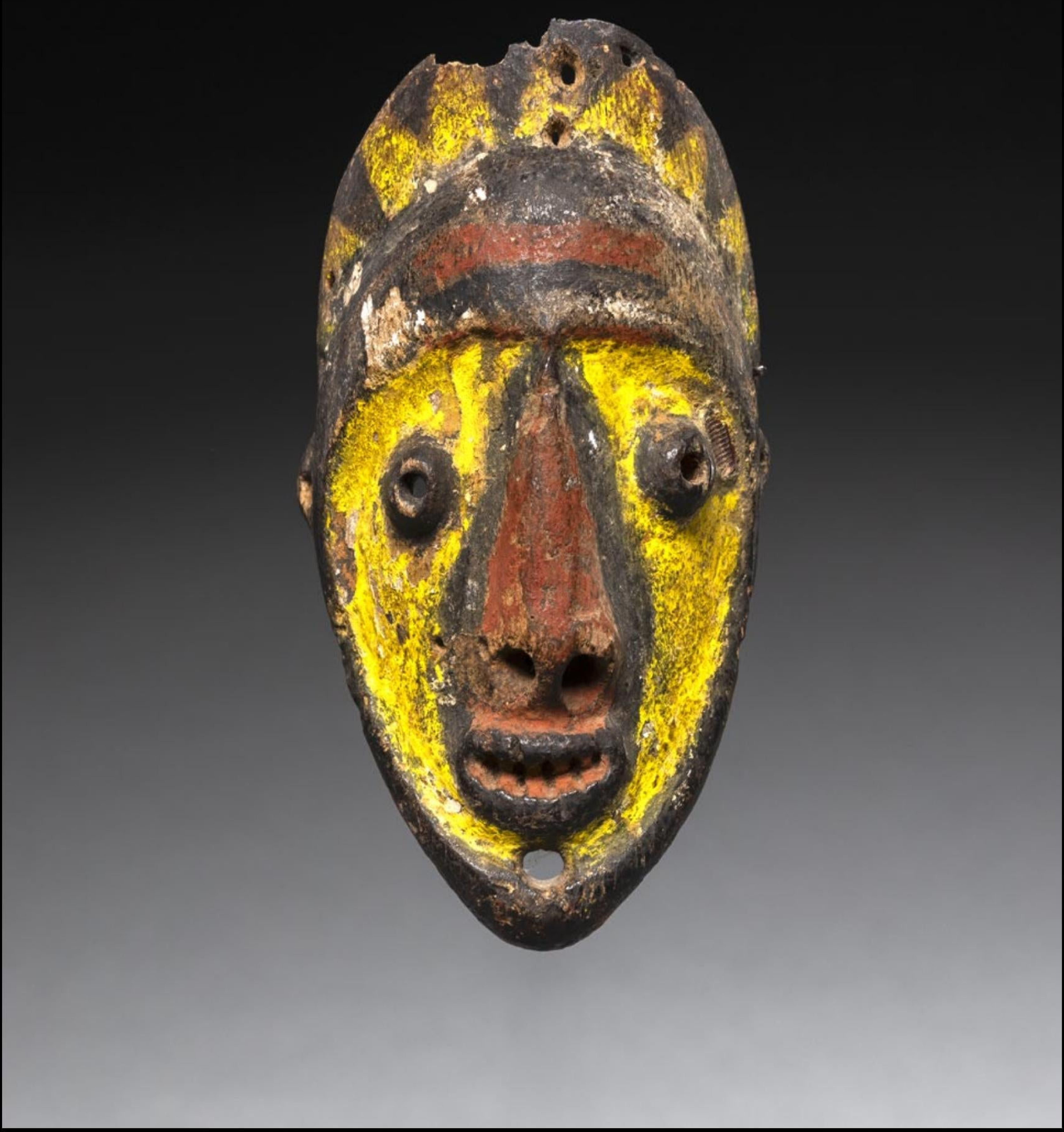
There are a few things to take note of on this large Upper Keram/Middle Ramu River flute mask. The slit, tired-looking eyes, and askew mouth give the piece a clear personality that is rarely encountered. The saturated orange color is dry and layered—as one would hope to find since it indicates repetitive ritual use. I love the orange dots along the downward-pointing hook. The concave backside allows the mask to fit snugly around the contours of the thick bamboo flute. Combined, these elements give an unquestionable integrity to the mask, where all the elements confirm its age, authenticity, and cultural appropriateness. Back in 2007, I wrote the following about the aesthetics of integrity that also apply to this flute mask:

When a work of art has integrity everything about it seems right and correct, from the heft of it in hand, to the smoothness of where it is gripped. It is all those tangible elements where every line, curve, and volume fit the original composition while all the wear, patina, piercings, attachments, and pigments confirm its long traditional use. Integrity can also be found in all the intangible qualities such as expression, character and the sense of magical or spiritual weight; where the original animating presence is still vital, where the ancestral fire within still burns bright.

19 Yangoru Boiken Wood Yam Mask

Yangoru Boiken area, Prince Alexander Mountains, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea
Ex. Chris Boylan Collection, Sydney
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
5 ½” (14 cm) in height

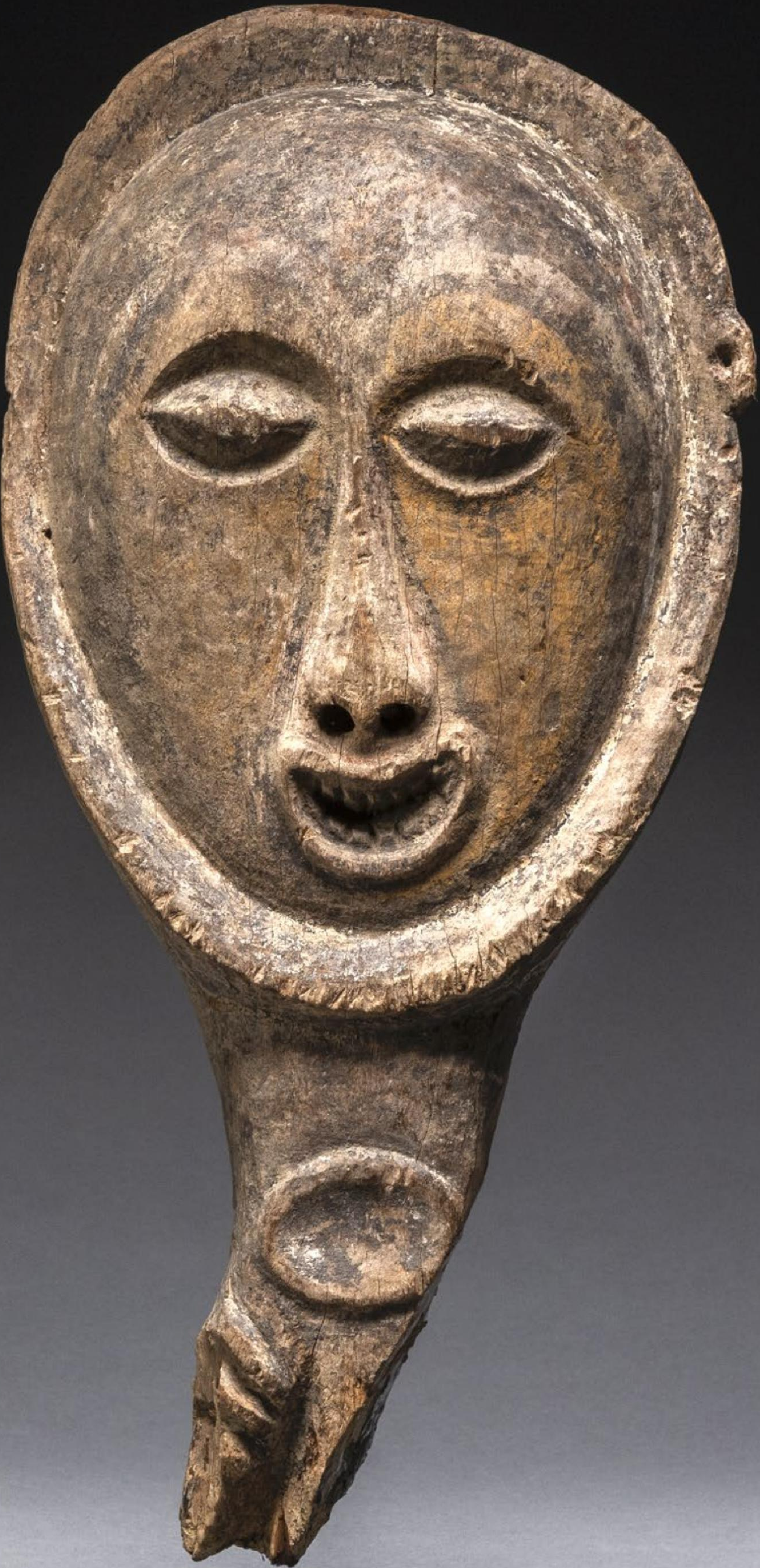
Yes, the Boiken culture had a long yam cult along the lines of their famous tuber-growing neighbors to the east. The Abelam’s magical and ritual power to consistently harvest massive yams duly impressed virtually all other contiguous cultures. Most research tend to place the Boiken adoption of long yam display to the last 100 years. This ancient precontact yam mask suggests they need to rethink that timeline.



20 Yangoru Boiken Lintel Head

Yangoru Boiken area, Prince Alexander Mountains, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Sam & Sharon Singer Collection, San Francisco
Published in *Aesthetics of Integrity of New Guinea Art*, 2007, pp102/3
Precontact, Stone-carved, late 19thcentury
22” (56 cm) in height.

Clarity is the aesthetic quality in New Guinea art that communicates form and expression with only the barest essential sculptural elements. This ancestral face, probably from one end of a Yangoru Boiken lintel, uses the seemingly simple interplay of cut-out and relief carving to let light and shadow create drama and character. With elegant reserve, the carver employs a minimal amount of surface detail to compose an ancestral spirit with a serene and dignified countenance. The piece is stone-carved and has soft remains of yellow, black, and white traditional pigments.

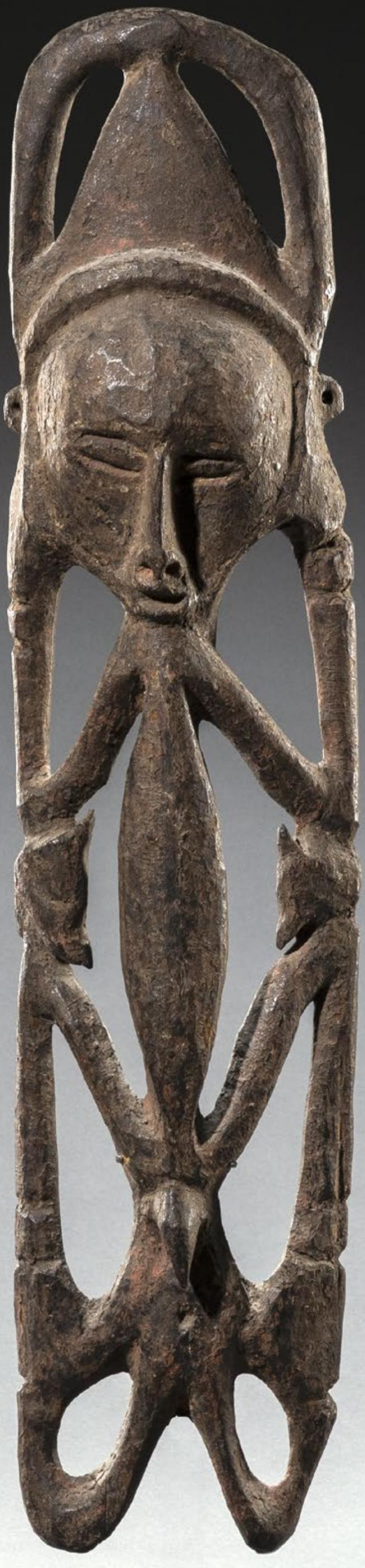


21 Abelam Figure

Eastern Abelam area, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Collected in 1964
Bruce Seaman Collection, Hawaii
Wayne Heathcote, London
Sotheby's New York, 15 May 2003, lot 382
Tomkins Collection, Connecticut
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
27 ¾" (70.5 cm) in height

Although the Austrian ethnographer Richard Thurnwald passed through the Abelam area as early as 1914, it is generally agreed that true contact with the West occurred closer to 1937 when gold was discovered near Maprik. While Abelam culture churned forcefully along in the intervening decades, with a close look at the changing style of their figurative sculptures, some definite trends can be seen. As with virtually all Sepik Basin sculpture post contact, pieces become increasingly stiff and upright, almost militaristic in posture. Gone are the bent limbs and sense of movement or barely contained energy. With the Abelam the arms and legs that once were carved free from the body are later stuck, connected to the same column of wood.

Not so with this figure. Here, as one would expect with a precontact, stone-carved object, there is a total absence of straight lines. The volumes seem as if fashioned with clay rolled in the hand rather than carved from wood. The overall form is supple and buoyant. The expression with downcast eyes is not demure but protecting the uninitiated from his deadly gaze. This figure with its airy openwork surrounding the thin rounded limbs can serve as the marker or starting point of early Abelam sculpture from which all others came after.

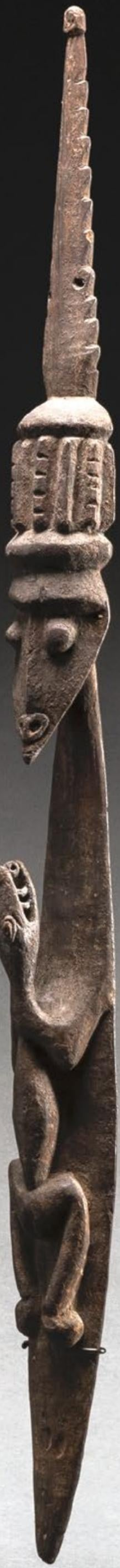


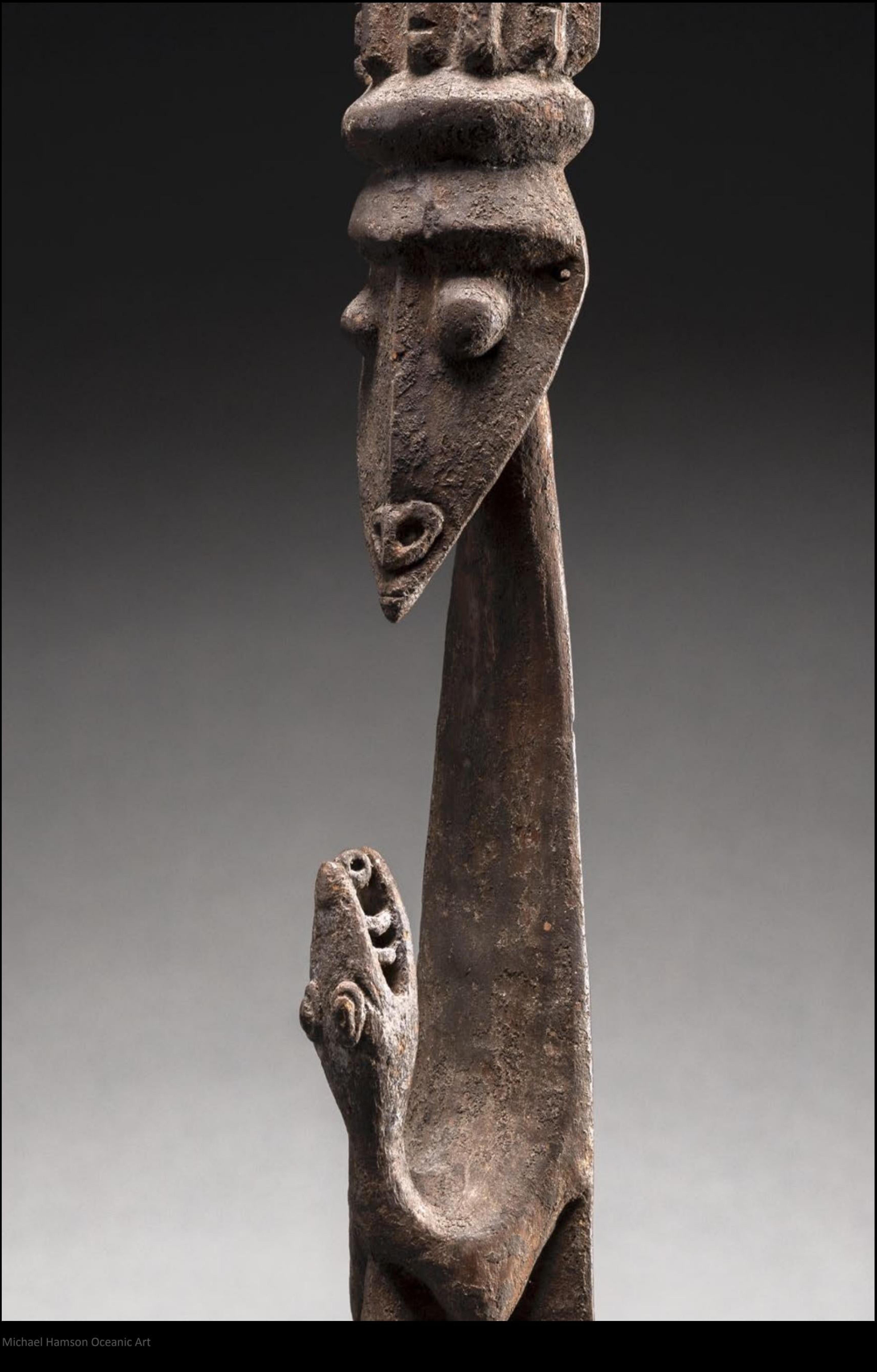
22 North Coast Ritual Object

Aitape area, West Sepik Coast, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea
Ex. Jolika Collection of Marica and John Friede, Rye, New York
Bruce Frank, NY
Bruce Moore Collection, Belvedere, CA
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
33 ¼” (84.5 cm) in height

You don’t need to be a connoisseur of Oceanic art to recognize the hand of a master. As with this piece there is a surety and confidence in both composition and execution. The head juts well away from the neck and angles sharply down to a tiny mouth. A lizard emerges from the wood below with open mouth and sharp teeth. There is a tension between the calm expression of the main figure and the lizard reaching upwards that results in a transcendental piece of sculpture.

John and Marcia Friede Collection,
Rye, New York circa 2005

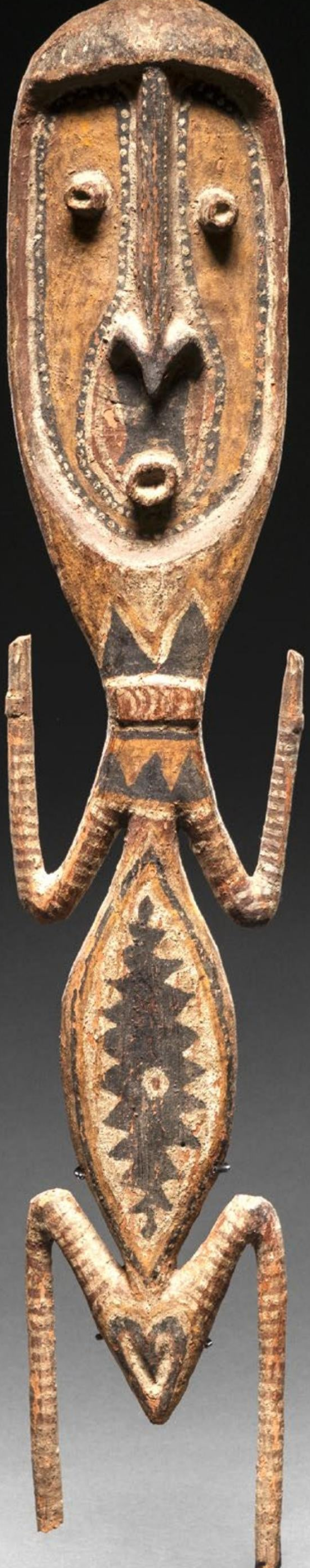




23 Nagum Boiken Female Ancestral Spirit Figure

East of Yangoru Boiken area, Prince Alexander Mountains, Papua New Guinea
Ex. Rudi Caesar, Ethnographic Art of Papua New Guinea, Madang
Dr. Paul Packman, St. Louis, acquired from above on 9 Nov. 1980
By descent
Precontact and stone-carved, 19th century
28 ¾” (73 cm) in height

Boiken art has an amazing breadth of style that ranges from archaic and menacing to delicate and ephemeral. This figure has a spectral quality with an elongated head, tubular eyes, and a mouth pursed as if whistling. The spindly limbs are in the hocker position around a pointed ellipse belly with a black dentate design that when viewed horizontally brings to mind the vagina dentata motif that some folks find so alluring…Overall the composition is a balance of delicacy, precision, and eeriness.



24 Massim Figure

Massim culture, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea
Nancy and John Hyde Devoe Collection, New York, acquired in the 1950's - 1970's.
By descent
19th century
28" (71.1 cm) in height

Recognizing 19th century Massim material from what came later is pretty straightforward. Look for the teeth. Look for an untamed quality, an animated vitality that had yet to calcify into the decorative—the inarguably beautiful but often sexless and soulless made-for-sale objects common even before the 1940s. This female figure is not that.

Surely the carver of this figure was competent, but he was not concerned with outward perfection and symmetry. He was trying to capture a presence with real spiritual juice to get things done. The female sex is clearly indicated, the stance is wide, the mouth is open, baring its teeth in an expression of doubtful welcome.

The eyes are obviously different. The late Massim art expert Harry Beran once remarked on a lime spatula that had two distinctly dissimilar eyes that this could indicate a physical deformity—which was not uncommonly depicted on early Massim art—but also that this could be a depiction of winking. He had been told several times that winking was a means of covert communication on Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands.[1]

On the back of the figure is an old label that has confounded all my efforts at deciphering. I have encountered this exact label style and numbering system on a 19th century Papuan Gulf shoulder shield in a private New Jersey collection and on a Massim wood dish at the Penn Museum purchased from W. O. Oldman in 1912—but an Oldman provenance is yet to be confirmed.

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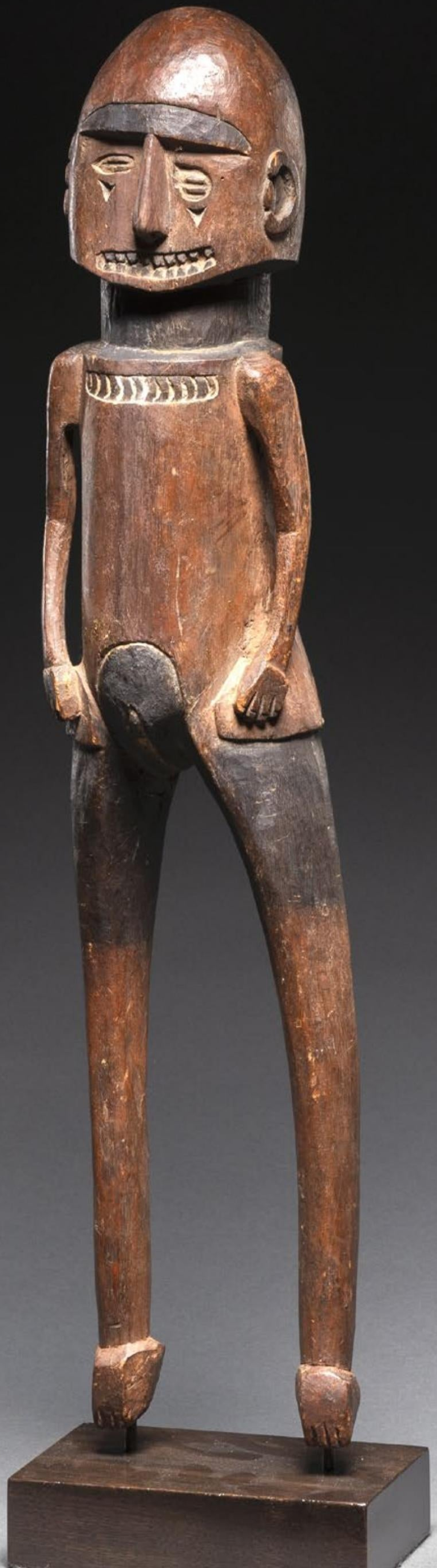
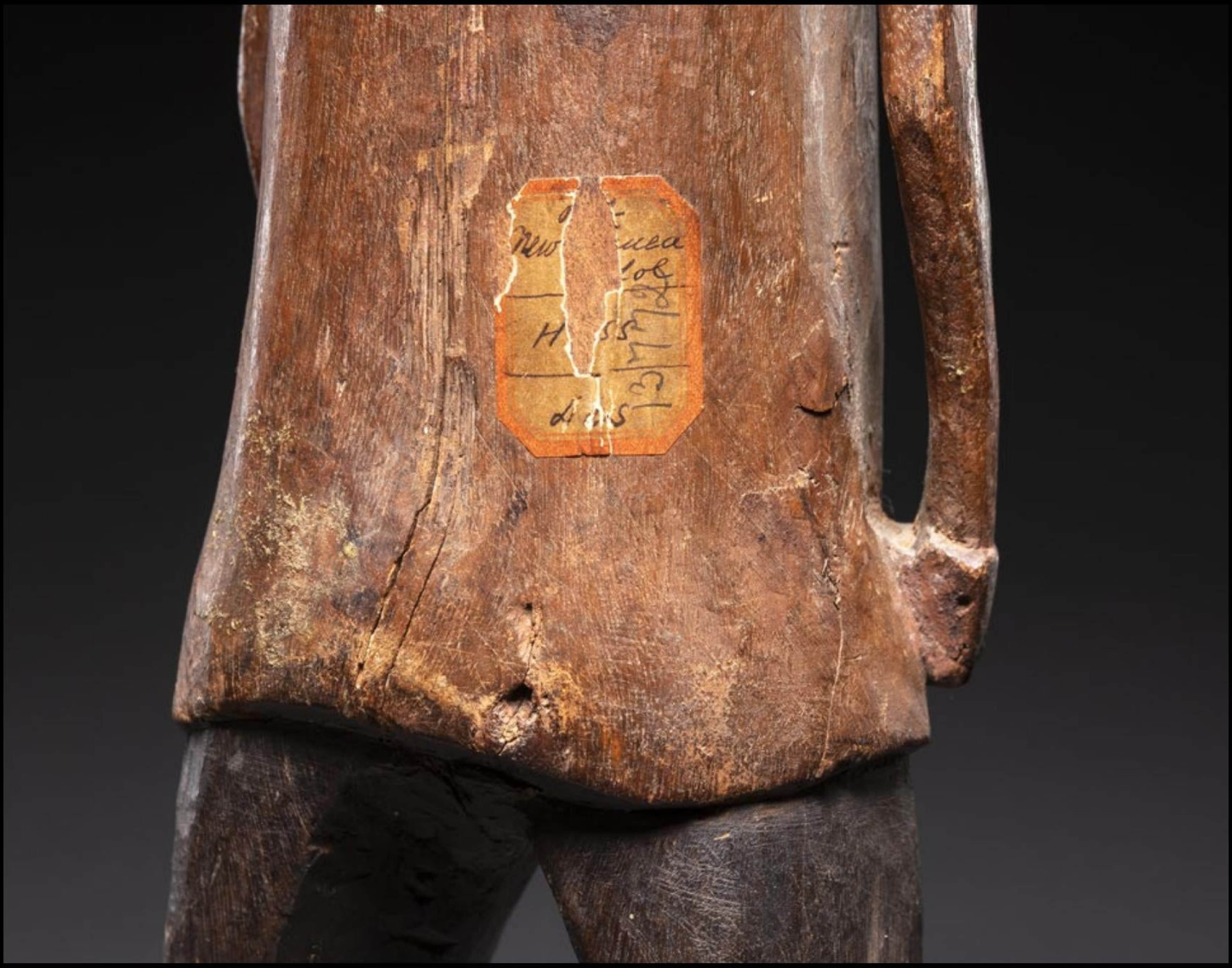
[1] Harry Beran, Revised version of *"The depiction of physical abnormalities in Oceanic art, especially in the Massim region of Papua New Guinea, and its distinction from artistic license"* Draft 8, Nov. 2013, pp. 8/9.

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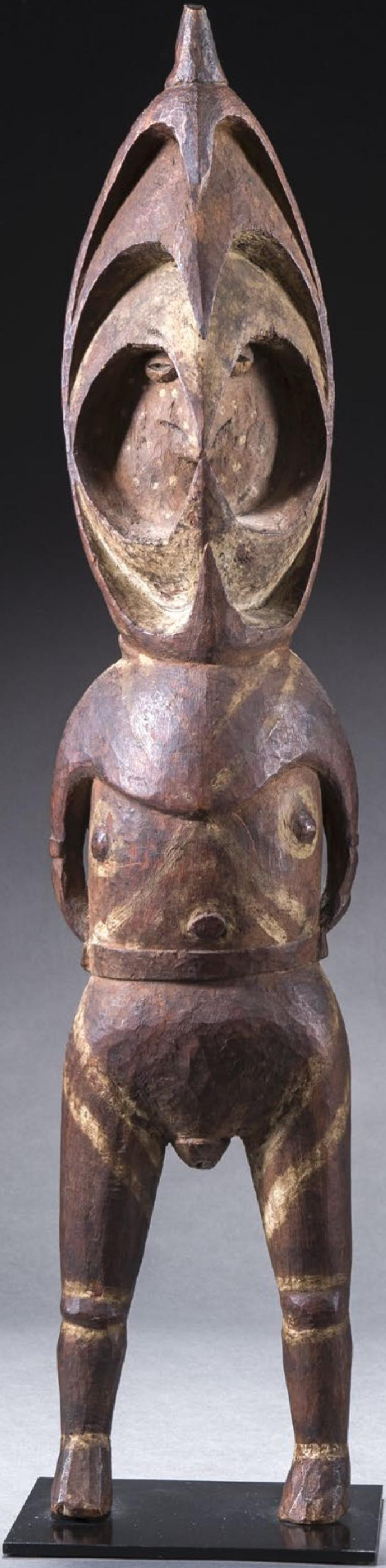
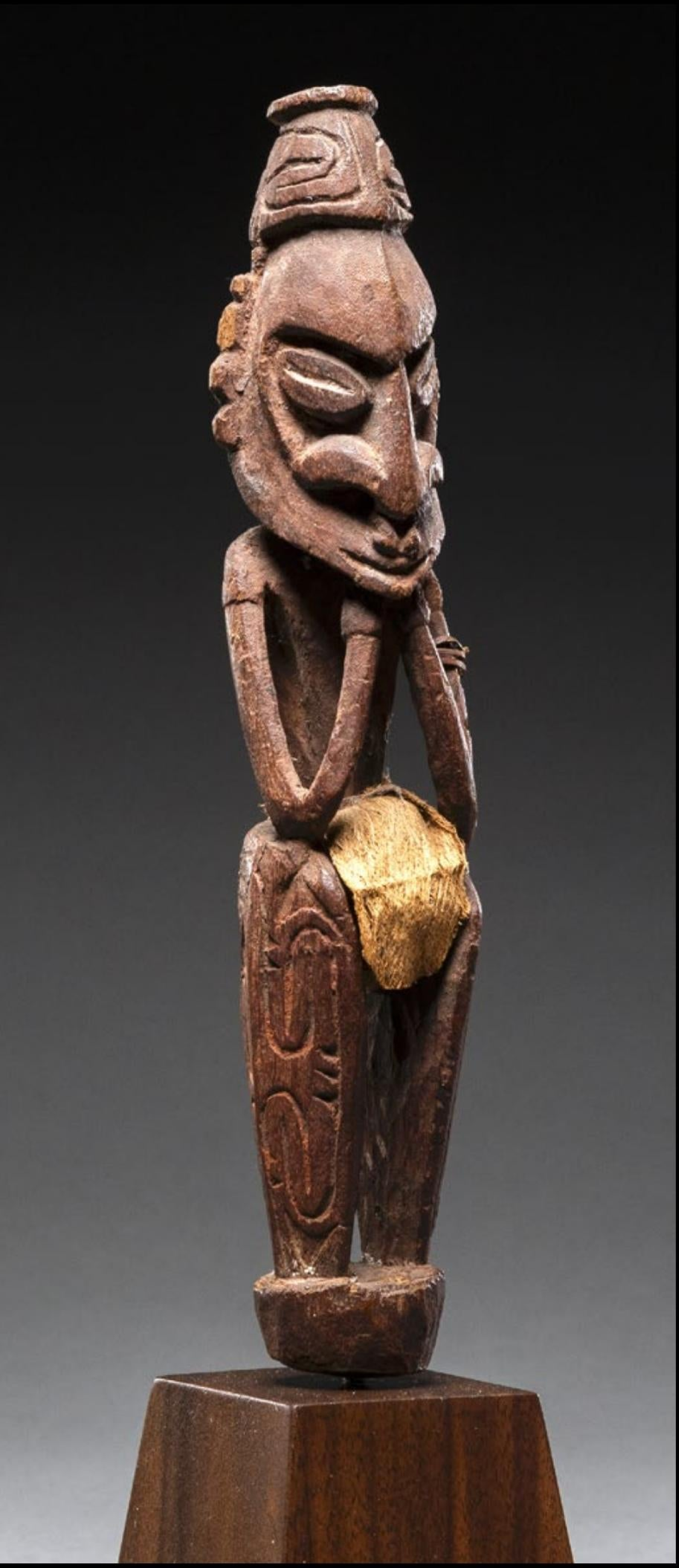
25 **Guam River Figure**

Breri culture, Guam River area, Madang Province,
Papua New Guinea
Wayne Heathcote, New York
Albert Folch Collection, Barcelona (#5259),
purchased from Wayne Heathcote on July 19, 1976
David Serra, Barcelona, September 2017
James Rega Collection, Los Angeles
Early 20th century
33” (83.8 cm) in height

There is almost a militaristic quality to this early Guam River figure. The legs are solidly shoulder-width apart, hands are at the sides, angled slightly back in readiness and respect. The face, protected by a series of opposed hooks, is alert and watchful. The stout fellow has nice remains of white pigments and an aged patina.





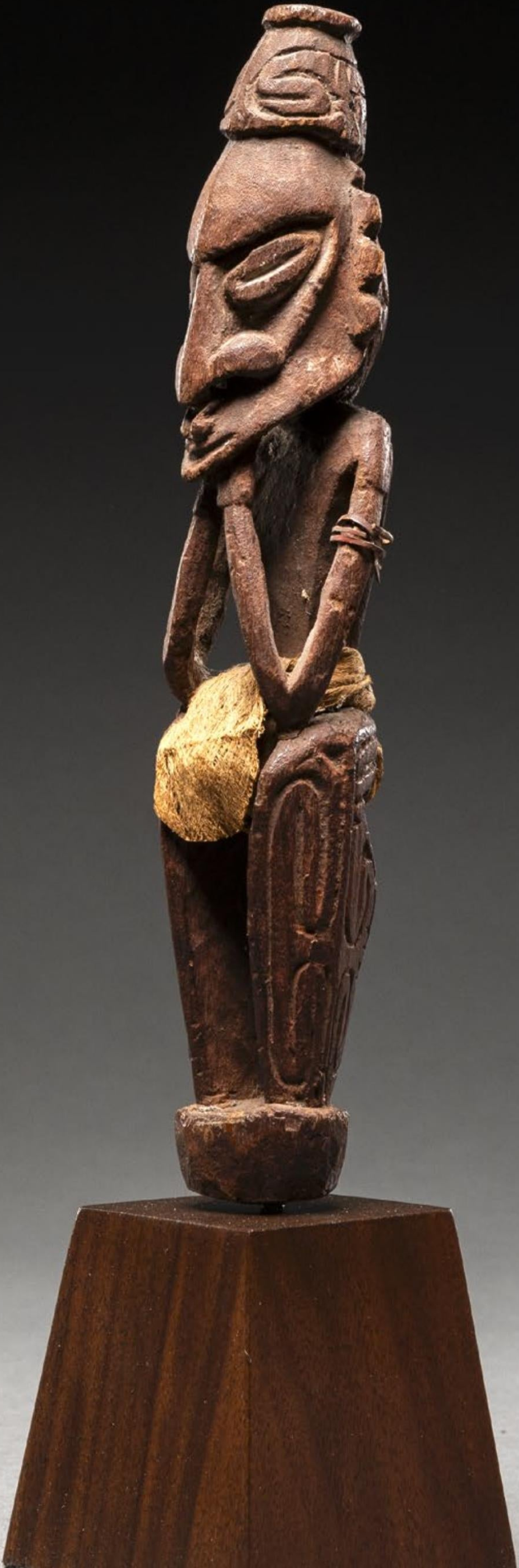
26 Coastal Ramu River Figure

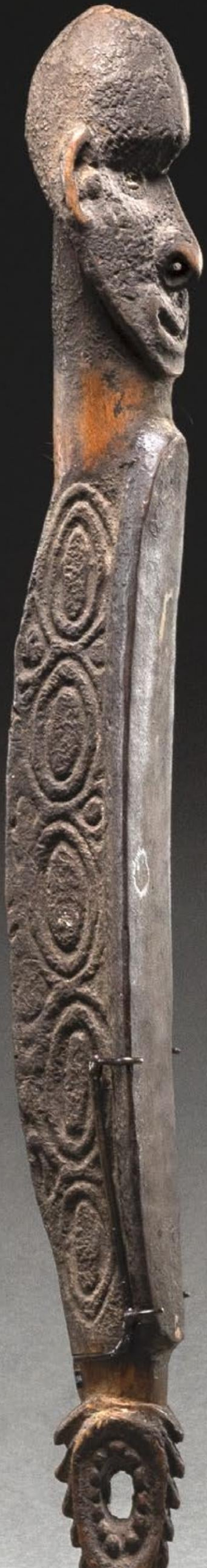
Mouth of Sepik and Ramu Rivers, Papua New Guinea
Purportedly A.J. de Lorm, ethnographic department curator at the Museum voor het Onderwijs (Museum for Education) in The Hague from 1925 to 1944.
In the late 1920s de Lorm gave the figure to a private collector in Barchem, Holland who then sold it to a private Dutch collector in 1964.
By descent.
Precontact, stone-carved, late 19th century
9 5/8" (24.3 cm) in height

I guess what I am looking for in an early precontact Sepik or Ramu River figure is personhood, meaning that sense of both individuality and animation—a known, recognizable character whose spirit within still glows. This present figure has that. It was not created to mimic something but to bring a very specific being to life.

The head is large with deeply cut features—sweptback eyes and a flared nose with nosepiece dangling from the pierced septum. There is a smile, not of greeting but of a hungry person staring at a long-awaited meal. The torso is angular and fit, the twig-thin arms curve up to the chin. These are in stark contrast to widely flared legs that taper to the small circular base. The heaviness of the bottom half supports the almost skeletal upper body.

The once red pigments have been muted with age to a soft terracotta color. Tailings of cane adorn its left arm, and around the waist is a coconut fiber waist cloth. On the back of the head is an oval recess with something still inside (magical?).





27 Middle Sepik River Neckrest Top

Iatmul culture, Middle Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Ex. Herbert Tischner Collection (1906-1984)
Galerie Lemaire, Amsterdam
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
20 ¾” (52.5 cm) in height

Neckrests are very personal objects in Papua New Guinea. Over their life, they become connected with a particular person such that when that person dies, the neckrest is often buried with them or kept as an heirloom to remember the owner. The incredibly thick encrusted patina demarks this as one of the latter. The lumpy surface is history of the years stored up in the rafters collecting dust, spiderwebs and smoke from the cooking fires. Fortunately, the stone-carved design was carved deep enough to still show clearly under the generational crust. The face with its open benevolent expression still greets the world.

Hamburg Curator of Oceania Herbert Tischner

By Rainer Buschmann

Herbert Tischner (1906-1984) was a long-time curator of the Oceanic Division at the Hamburg Ethnographic Museum. He oversaw the division during the crucial years following the loss of valuable artifacts during World War II. Although Tischner never traveled to Oceania, he initiated essential collaborations with Lutheran missionaries operating in the highlands of New Guinea.

Herbert Tischner, courtesy Museum am Rothenbaum Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK)

Herbert Tischner was born in Halberstadt in 1906. He graduated from high school in Goslar in 1927. In the following years, Tischner studied anthropology, archaeology, and geography in Frankfurt am Main and Hamburg. In 1934, he completed his PhD thesis on house types in Oceania. He stated in his acknowledgements that Georg Thilenius, Paul Hambruch, and Otto Dempwolff were significant influences. These early anthropologists and linguists, who had visited the region during colonial times, would profoundly mold Tischner's outlook on the fate of Pacific artifacts.

Even before completing his dissertation, Tischner took an unpaid position at the Ethnographic Museum (Museum für Völkerkunde) in Hamburg in 1933. This pivotal year was marked by the Nazi Party's rise to power in Germany and the passing of Paul Hambruch—participant in the Hamburg South Sea Expedition (1908-1910) and later curator of Oceania in Hamburg. This realignment enabled Tischner to secure an assistant position in the Department for Oceania at the museum in 1936. Museum director Georg Thilenius warned Tischner's father that pursuing an ethnographic career would involve financial risks, but his son chose to continue studying the Pacific. After achieving some economic stability, Tischner married Gertrud Henze in 1937. These were difficult years for the young curator. Although he joined the Nazi Party in 1933, he did so only at his father's urging. Even as a party member, later Hamburg director Franz Termer noted that Tischner consistently rejected Nazi ideology, refusing to display party emblems or perform the customary German greeting. In his dissertation, Tischner also avoided Nazi racial categorization. It is conceivable that this attitude contributed to social isolation and limited career advancement opportunities. After 1941, he was drafted into the German army and served for the duration of the war. Upon his return at the end of the conflict, the then museum director, Franz Termer, vindicated Tischner, allowing him to resume his position as assistant curator in Hamburg.

The conditions encountered by Tischner were appalling. In an article for the Journal de la Société des Océanistes (1947), he wrote about the devastating impact of the Second World War on his division: "Of all the Oceania collections in Germany, it is undoubtedly the one in Hamburg that has suffered the most serious and irreparable loss… The entire Oceania collection in storage—that is, two-thirds of the Oceania

department—burned, except for large objects such as spears, shields, and malangan sculptures from New Ireland, among others. The heaviest loss to be deplored here is that of the important Micronesian collection acquired in situ in 1910 under the best scientific conditions of the Hamburg South Sea Expedition. This collection has completely disappeared; it can never be replaced, and its loss is irreparable… [Fortunately], the original meeting house of the New Zealand Māori withstood all the ravages of the war in Hamburg."

Later biographers, especially Hans Fischer, criticized Tischner for holding outdated views on Pacific cultures and their material products. In his youth, the curator traveled widely across Europe and North Africa. Yet, despite his evident passion for Oceania, he never actually visited the region. While the rise of the Nazis and the outbreak of the subsequent war contributed to this, Tischner probably believed—shaped by his education from predecessors Georg Thilenius and Paul Hambruch—that the modern Pacific had experienced significant cultural decline since the early 20th century. He preferred to study materials collected during initial encounters and early colonial administration. As early as the 1930s, in his dissertation, he opposed conducting fieldwork, arguing that in-place research would come too late for many parts of Oceania. Throughout many of his works, Tischner focused on artifacts and written sources from early collectors. A prime example is an article written in 1950 for the Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, where he referenced F. E. Hellwig's notes from the turn of the century to describe a chief's burial on Luf Island. His view of the fading Pacific Island cultures remained unchanged even shortly before he passed away. His last book, published in 1981 and dedicated to the ethnographic collections at the Natural History Museum in Nuremberg, called the artifacts "Documents of Vanished South Sea Cultures."

Despite his antiquarian outlook, it is noteworthy that Tischner is absent from the volumes of the Hamburg South Sea Expedition published shortly before World War II. Contrary to his evident expertise in Oceania, the editor's choice fell to Anneliese Eilers, who had written a dissertation on the social relations of Bantu children in Africa. Nevertheless, before Tischner was drafted into World War II, he devoted himself to preserving the last surviving footage of the cinematographic material collected by the Hamburg South Sea Expedition. Carefully transferring the combustible nitrate film to a safer contemporary medium, the movie was later transferred to VHS, DVD, and is currently available on streaming platforms. Unfortunately, the advanced state of deterioration of the material only allowed for about 11 minutes to be preserved.

Notwithstanding his inability to visit the Pacific and his limited view of contemporary Oceanic cultures, Tischer established a broad network of connections with national and international museums to expand existing Oceanic collections and address the gaps created by the Second World War. He also maintained a strong interest in new cultural areas during his tenure at the Hamburg Museum. In this effort, he formed an unlikely alliance with missionaries. Following gold prospectors who uncovered a significant population in the rugged interior of New Guinea, Lutheran missionaries began arriving in the region. In November of 1934, a group of missionaries led by Georg Vicedom established the Ogelbeng mission near Mt. Hagen. Two years later, one of his Lutheran colleagues, Hermann Strauss, gathered ethnographic information and artifacts. Tischer successfully obtained the collections for the Hamburg Museum and assisted in the publication of numerous monographs on the Milpa (Mbowamb) people, which are still regarded as significant ethnographic documents and were later translated by Andrew Strathern.

In his ethnographic descriptions, Tischer largely avoided excessive theorizing. In his dissertation on Oceanic house forms, he distanced himself from applying popular diffusionist concepts to his survey.

Similarly, his only academic confrontation focused on Thor Heyerdahl's now largely debunked theories about the settlement of the Pacific Islands. Choosing not to pursue theoretical innovations, Tischer instead concentrated on popularizing ethnographic research through displays and textbooks. In 1954, he published a guidebook to the Hamburg Oceanic collections titled "Oceanic Art," which was considered important enough to be translated into English and French. In 1959, he released a popular introductory book on ethnology. Overseeing the reopening of the Oceanic collections after World War II, he followed the advice of local artists to improve the displays. Shortly before retiring, he arranged the presentation of Oceanic masks based on the layout of commercial showcases found in local department stores.

It was only thirty-five years after he started working at the Hamburg Museum that he obtained the official curatorship of the Oceanic collections in Hamburg. The same year, 1968, he also became deputy director of the institution. He formally retired from his employment in 1971. In the following year, he was contacted by Gerd Koch, the Oceanic curator at the Berlin Museum, to participate in a large-scale expedition to West Papua. Probably due to his advanced age, Tischer declined this last opportunity to visit the Pacific. In 1984, he passed away in Hamburg.

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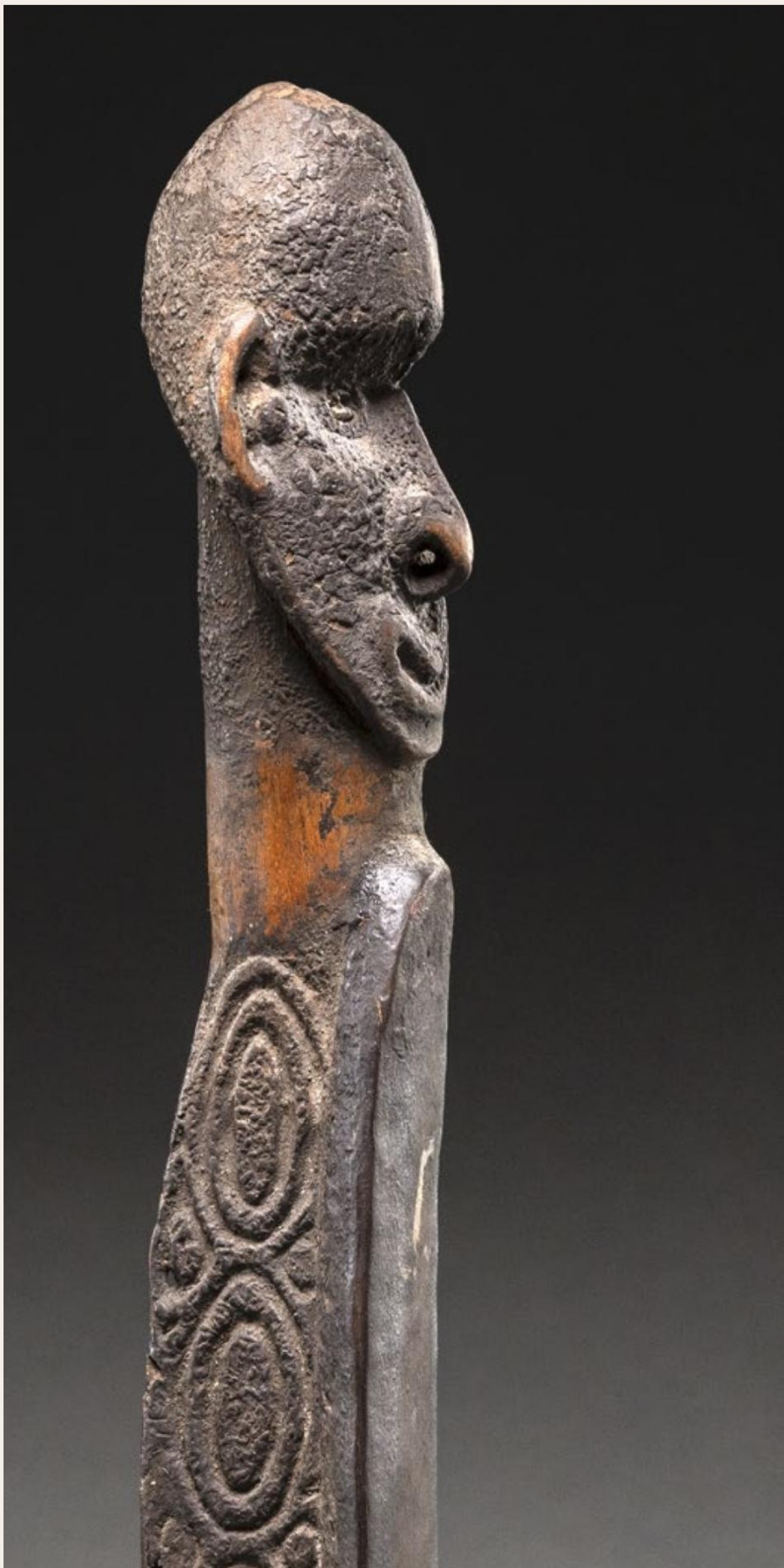
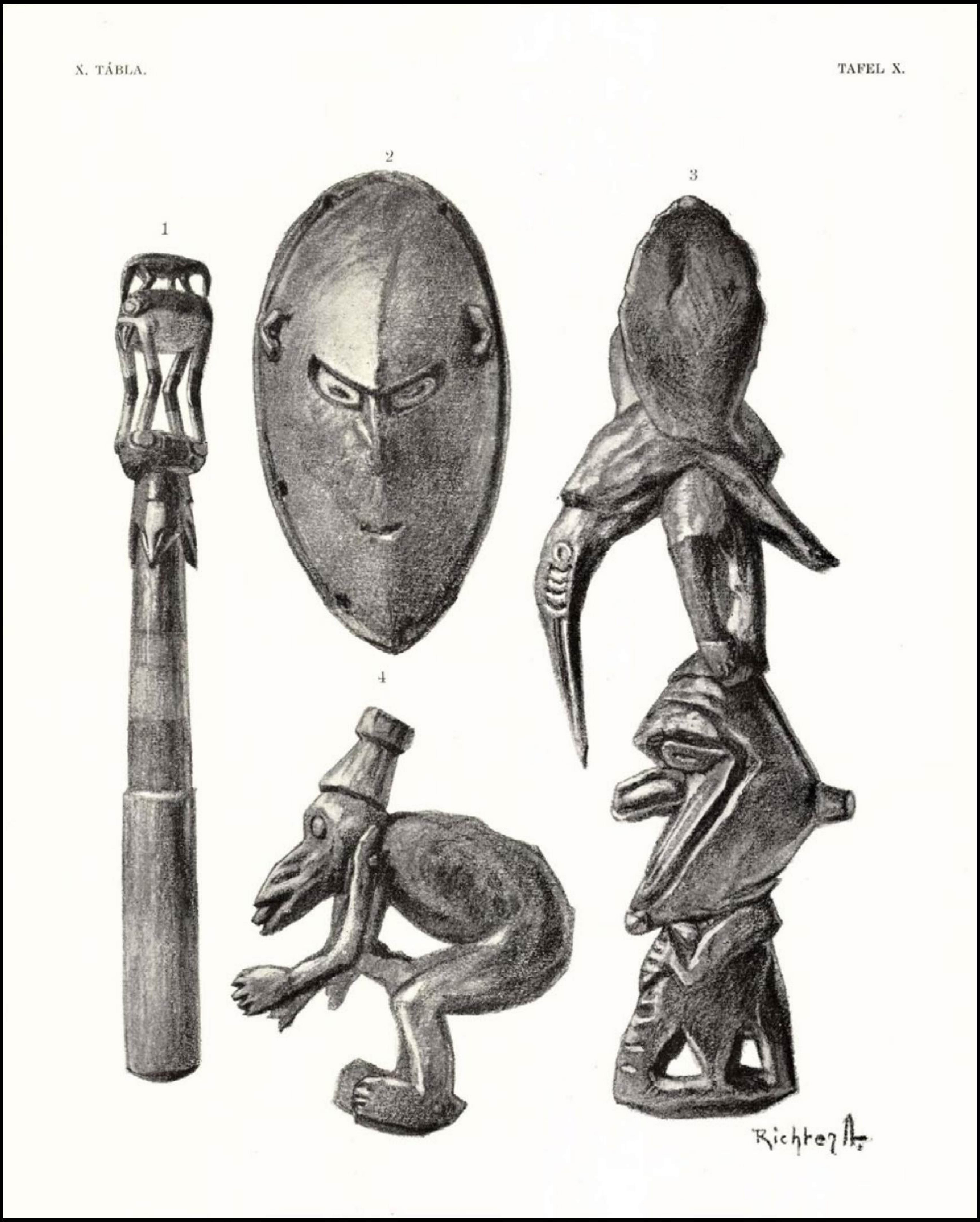


28 North Coast Canoe Ornament

Probably Tumleo people, Aitape area, Sandaun Province (West Sepik)
Stan Moriarty Collection, Sydney
Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede, Rye, NY
Bruce Frank, NY
Bruce Moore Collection, Belvedere, CA
Published in *New Guinea Art: Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede*, 2005, no. 22.
Late 19th century or before
14 ½" (37 cm) in height

I have found only one similar piece illustrated by Lajos Biro in 1899—see attached photo and the incredibly similar winged creature. My example is absolutely ancient with a thick encrusted patina and traces of pigments. One can only guess at the story of the spirit and the creature on top—its name, history, and dominion along this stretch of New Guinea coast. How and why is a winged creature gripping the top of the spirit's head? And how all this relates to ocean voyaging, fishing, or trading? All we have is this relic of physical evidence with an engaging, seemingly whimsical composition whose form tells a story we can't even begin to guess.



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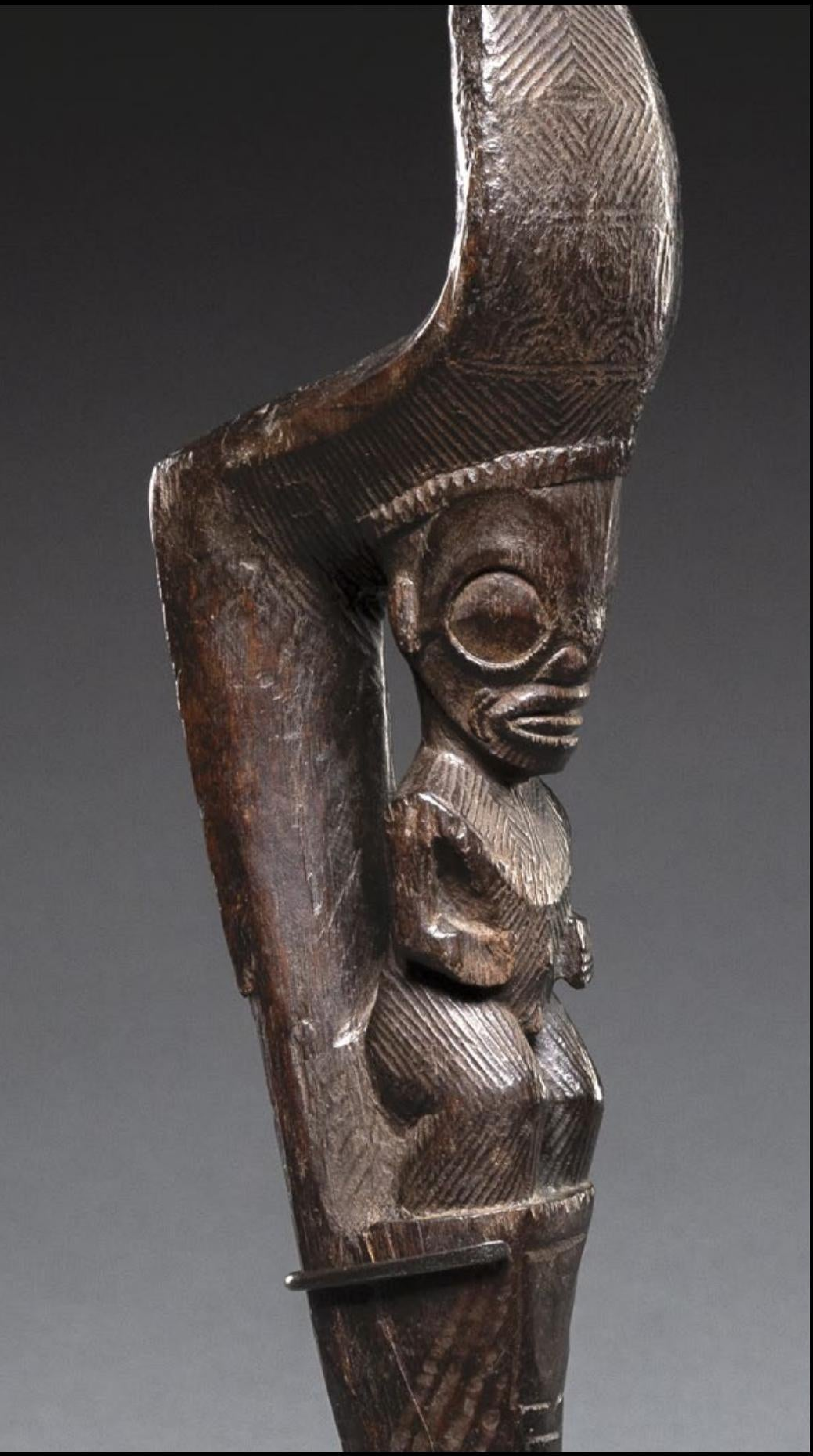
29 Two Guam River One-Leg Figures, *Asa*

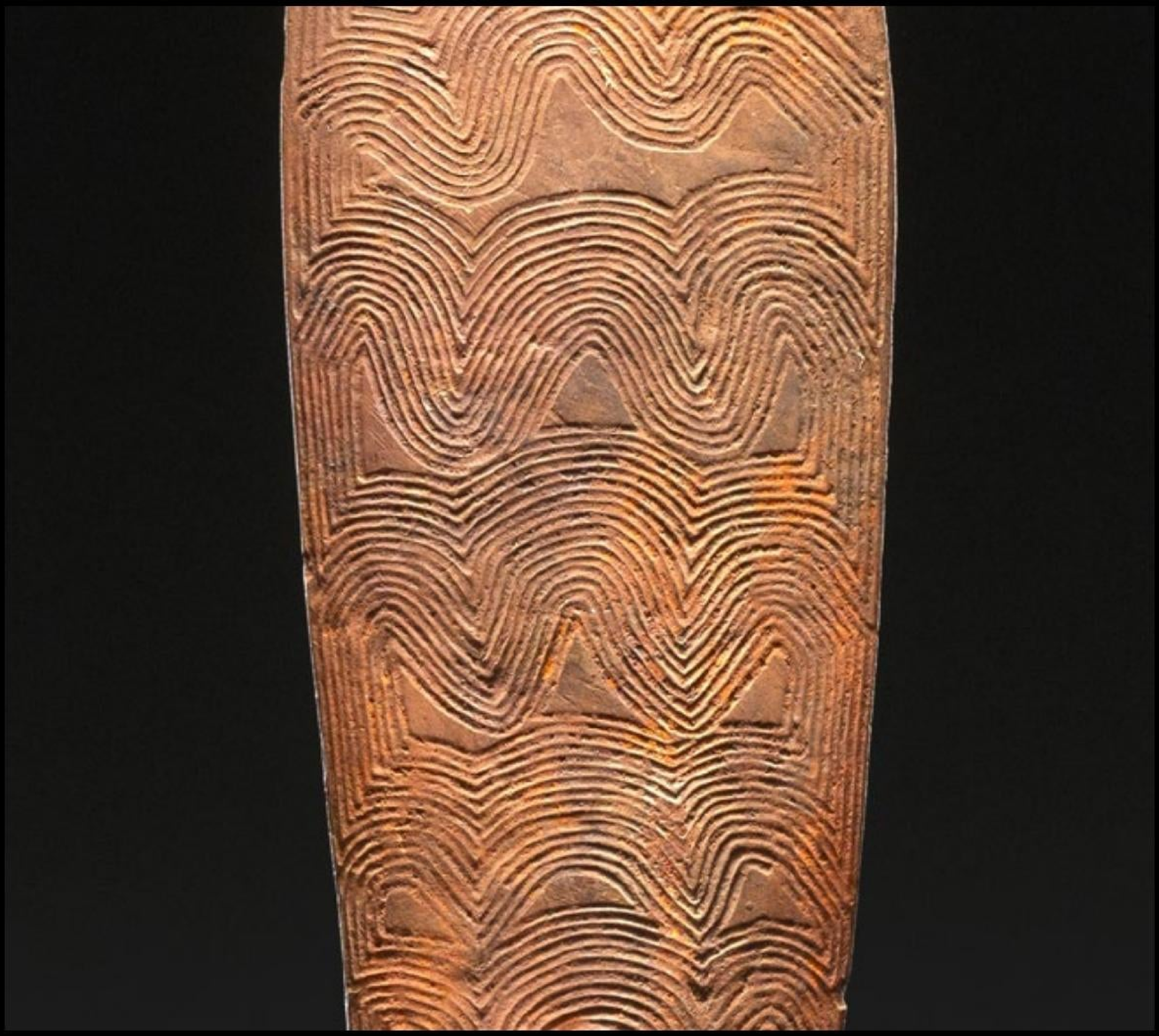
Breri or Igana culture, Guam River area, Madang Province,
Papua New Guinea
Michael Kremerskothen, Dortmund
Precontact, stone-carved, 19th century
Left is 50 ¾” (129 cm) and right is 58 ½” (148.6 cm) in height

Over the years I have seen a few of these Guam River one-leg figures come to the market. These two are the oldest by far—being assuredly precontact and stone-carved examples. Extensive research has been done on the neighboring Kominimung culture figures by Dirk Schmidt that gives us a decent idea on how these Breri or Igana examples might have been used. With the Kominimung, the one-legged figures are called *Ase* and manifest the powerful *Bwongongo* ancestral spirits. During male initiation, the dance leader dressed as a woman, prodded the initiates with the foot of the sculpture to literally and spiritually kick the boys out of their mother’s care and into the realm of men.



30 Marquesas Islands Stilt Step, *Tapuvae*

Marquesas Islands
Ex. Nantucket collection (ETH206)
Mark Blackburn, Hawaii
Private Palos Verdes collection
Early/mid 19th century
13 1/8” (33.3 cm) in height



31 Australian Aboriginal Stone Churinga

Yuendumu, Warlpiri people, Northern Territory, Australia
Sam & Sharon Singer Collection, San Francisco
Published in *Michael Hamson Oceanic Art Paris 2012*, no. 37
19th century
17” (43 cm) in height

32 Fijian Neckrest, *Kali*

Viti Levu, Fiji
Purportedly Chief Seru Epenisa Cakobau (Thakombau), King of Fiji
Gifted to Methodist missionary Annie Elizabeth Tookey in 1863
Borough of Nuneaton Museum & Gallery in 1969
By Descent
Early/mid 19th century
26 ¼” (66.5 cm) in length

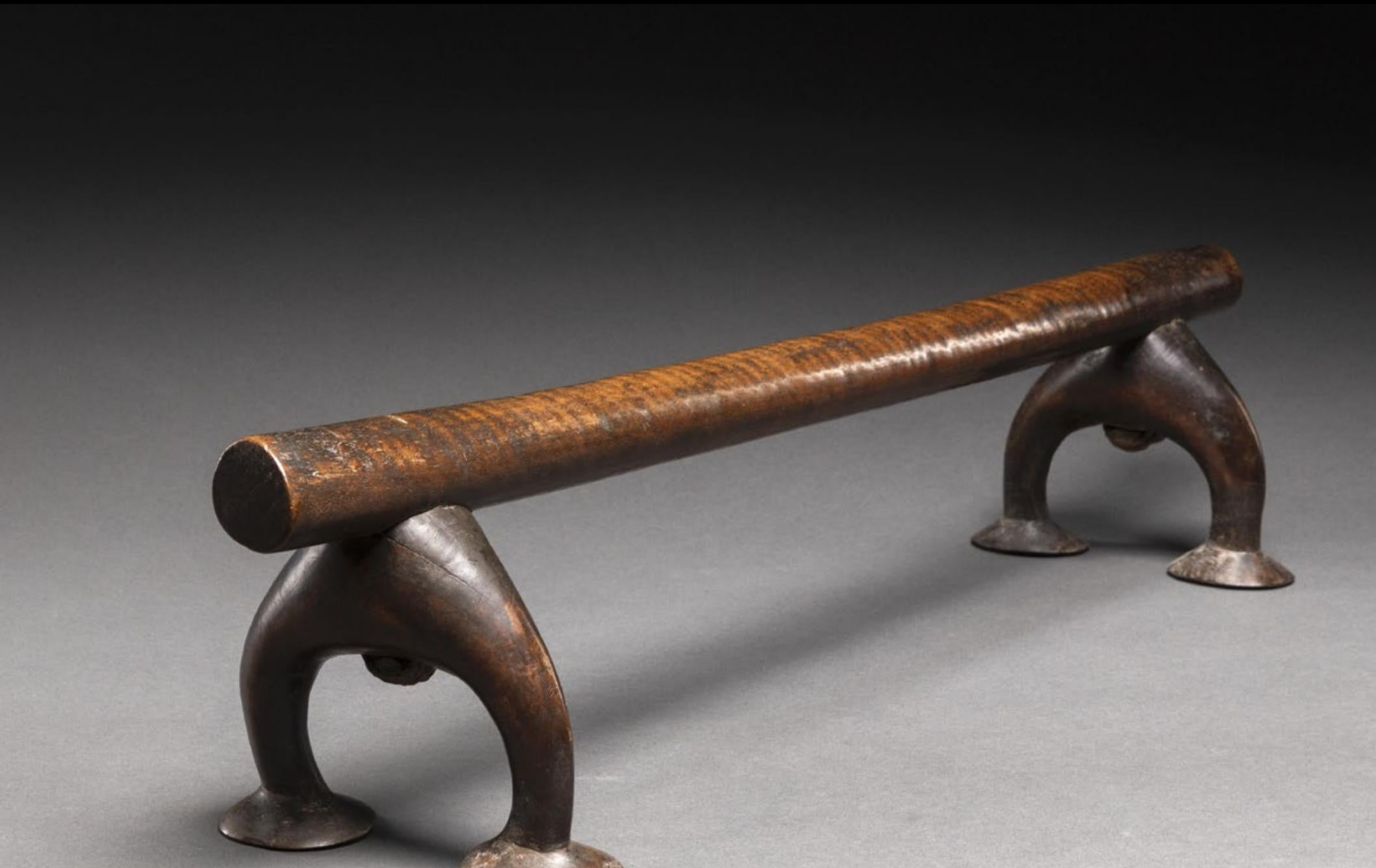
Don’t let the relaxed posture of the fellow in the accompanying painting fool you. Reclining on plaited mats, fan in hand, book and neckrest by his feet you would think this Fijian chief was a man of leisure. But look at the eyes. They at least hint at the legendary ferocity of this man. In a land known for war, where being a warrior was the ultimate goal of all men, Chief Thakombau was the most feared.

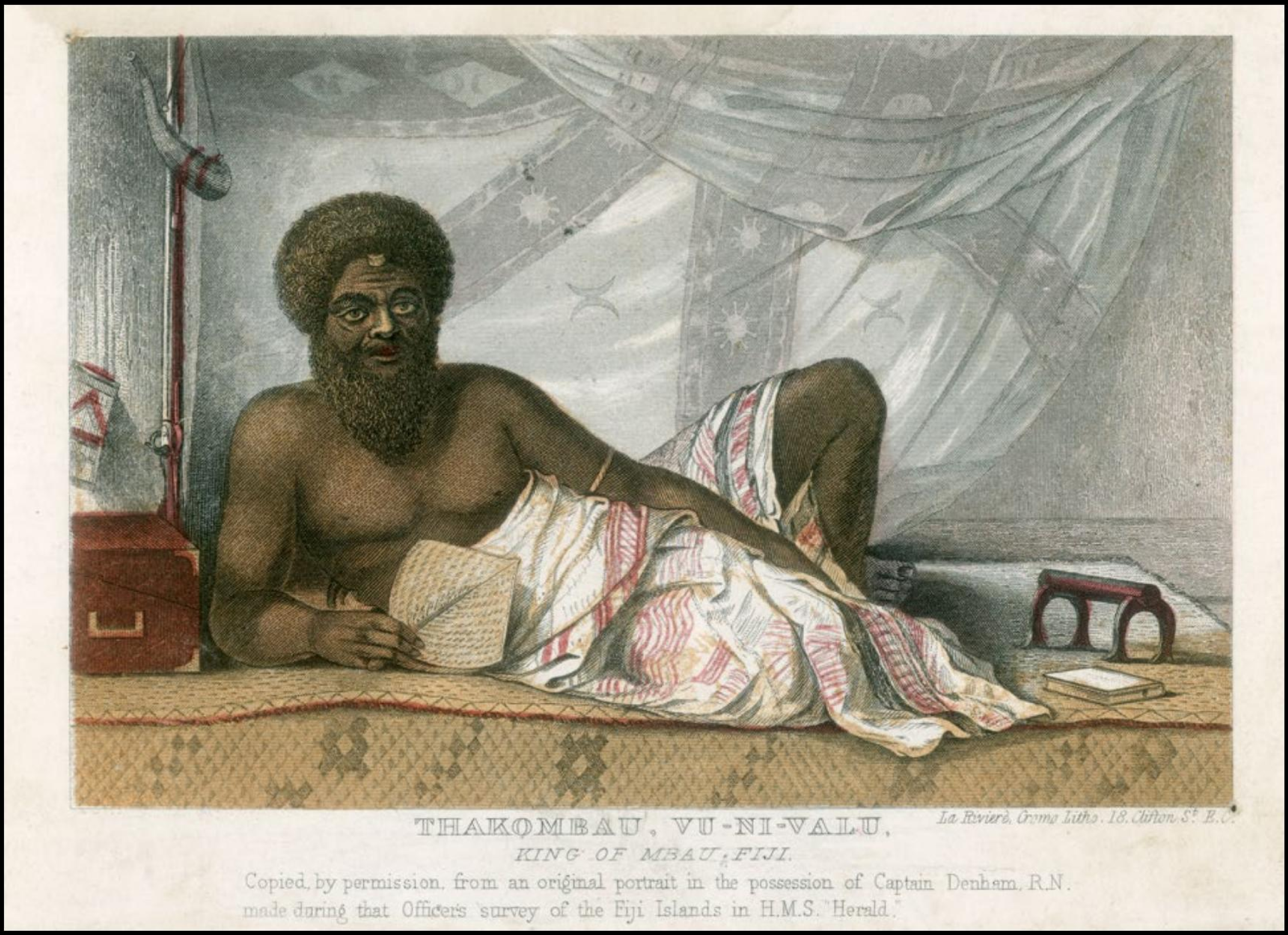
Thakombau (also called Cakobau) was known for his cunning and ruthlessness in battle. He prided himself on his adherence to the local gods, the eating of human flesh, and the custom of strangling the widows of deceased chiefs. As other Fijian chiefs slowly converted to Christianity, Thakombau defiantly resisted. For decades the pressure to convert was put on him not only by the Methodist missionaries but also by his Fijian and Tongan military allies. By the late 1840s most of Fiji had been converted but Thakombau cooly remarked to a visiting missionary that “Lotu (Christian religion) is near, but he and his warriors still had a few more towns to burn first.” It wasn’t until 1854 that Christianity took hold in Bau, that the ovens devoted to cooking human flesh were filled in and their chief, Thakombau, finally agreed to lotu.

It was shortly thereafter, with Christianity slightly dampening Thakombau’s warmongering that J. Glen Wilson painted the fearsome chief in repose.

Ten thousand miles away in England, Annie Elizabeth Tookey was training to be a missionary. In December of 1860 she boarded the ship “Liberator” bound for Sydney. By mid 1861, she was in Fiji under the care of Methodist missionaries James and Mary Calvert. Miss Tookey eventually settled on the island of Bau on the eastern side of Viti Levu. While Bau is a small island, it was the traditional seat of the most powerful army of Fiji led by chief Thakombau. Family tradition states that Thakombau himself gave Tookey the land to start a school, which to her amazement, 70 men built in a single day. There she taught reading, writing, and needlework to the wives and children of the local chiefs. One of her students was Asenath, Thakombau’s daughter who became a close friend to the young missionary.

After two and a half years, Tookey left for New Zealand where she eventually started a family and settled. But before that she sent a box of artifacts to her aunt back in England. Included in the batch was a club, fishhooks, tapa, tattooing tools, and the present neckrest and a bamboo version—next in this catalog. These two were gifts from Chief Thakombau himself. While it is impossible to say if this is the one and the same neckrest depicted in J. Glen’s painting, it is surely plausible.

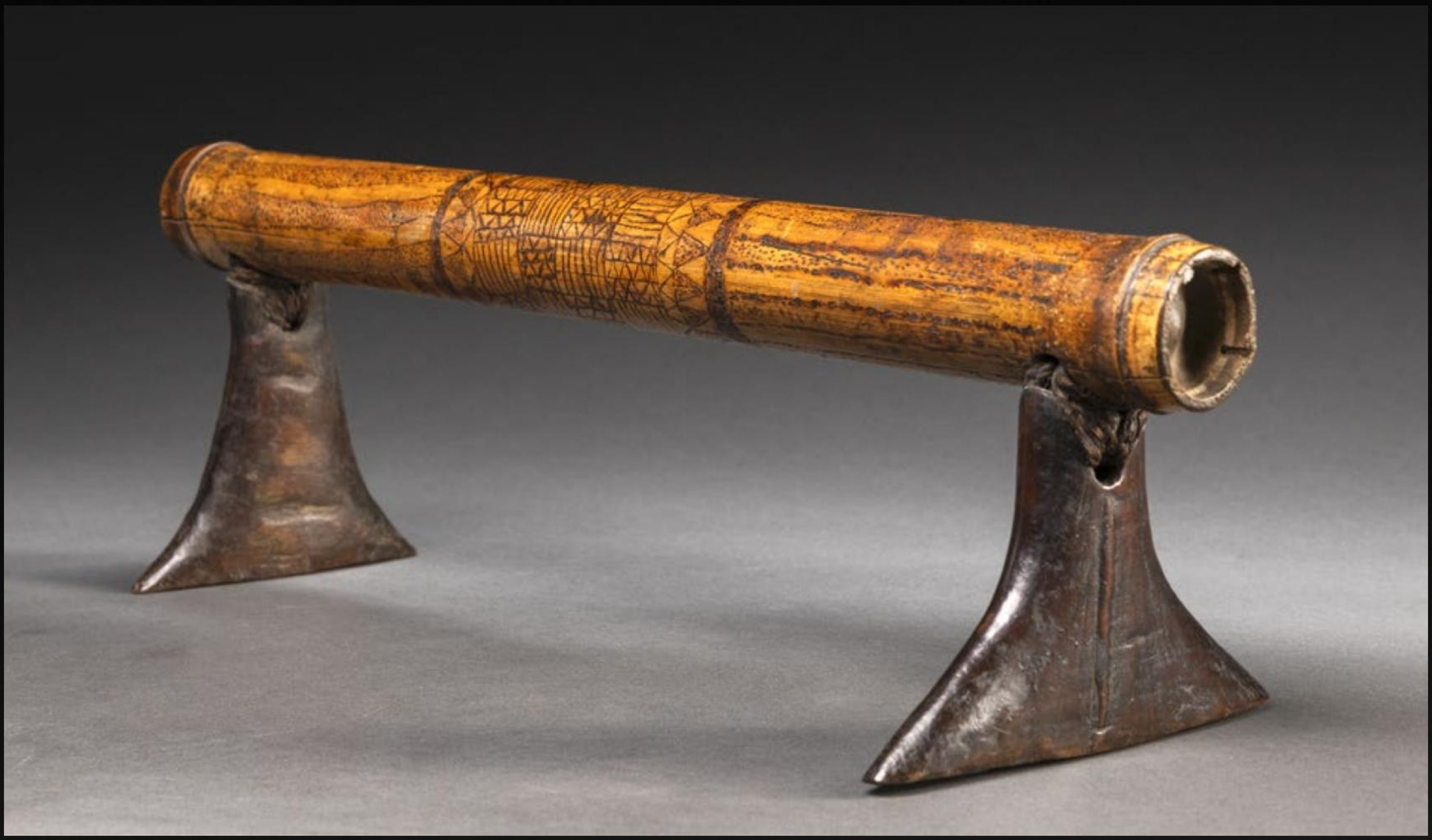



THAKOMBAU, VU-NI-VALU,
KING OF MBAU, FIJI.
Copied, by permission, from an original portrait in the possession of Captain Denham, R.N. made during that Officer's survey of the Fiji Islands in H.M.S. "Herald."
La Riviere, Chromo Litho. 18. Clifton St. E.C.

Thakombau, Vu-ni-valu, King of Mbau Fiji (Boston. Congregational Publishing Society, 1871)

Annie Elizabeth Lawson (nee Tookey), circa 1860s

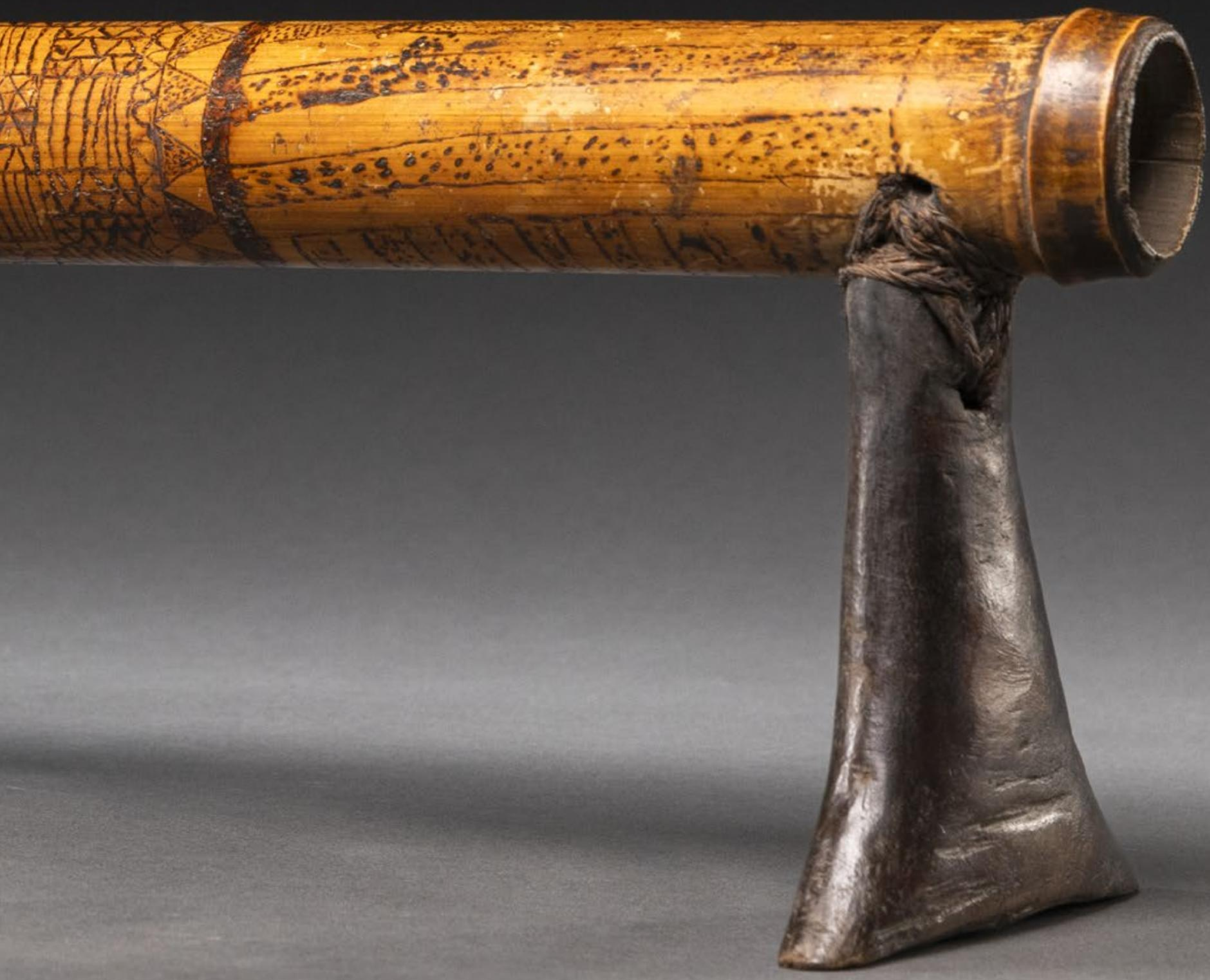
Thakombau, ex-king of Fiji, photograph by Dufty

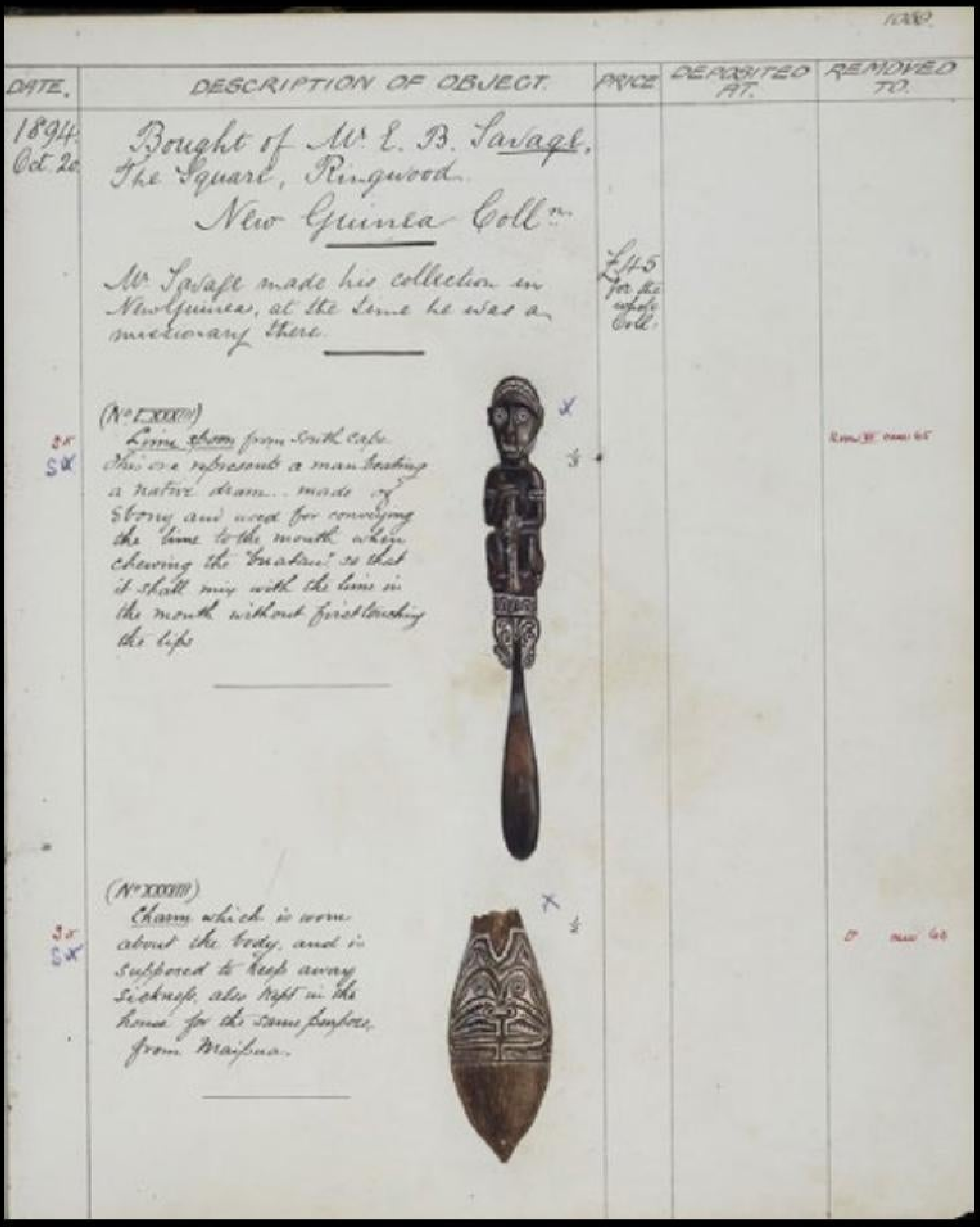


33 Fijian Bamboo Neckrest, *Kali Bitu*

Viti Levu, Fiji
Purportedly Chief Seru Epenisa Cakobau (Thakombau), King of Fiji
Gifted to Methodist missionary Annie Elizabeth Tookey in 1863
Borough of Nuneaton Museum & Gallery in 1969
By Descent
Early/mid 19th century
18 ¼" (46.3 cm) in length

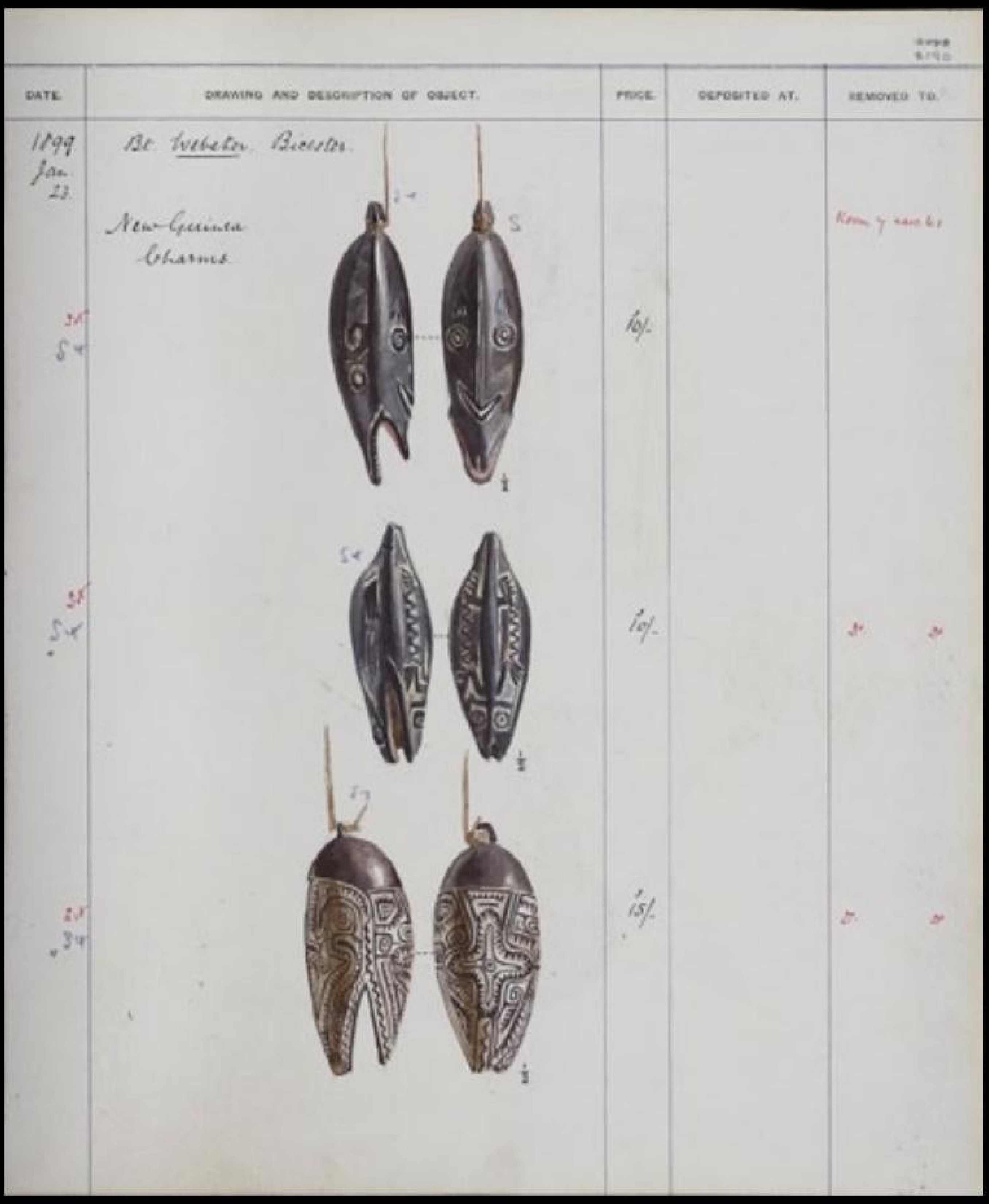
This is a very early *Kali Bitu* neckrest with ancient hardwood feet lashed to a length of bamboo decorated with pyro-engraved designs similar to those found on tapa. Both the bamboo neck support and wedge-shaped legs have worn, glossy surfaces from decades of intimate use. It too is of historical significance coming from Thakombau, one of the most influential early Fijian kings.





1039

DATE.	DESCRIPTION OF OBJECT.	PRICE	DEPOSITED AT.	REMOVED TO.
1894 Oct 20	Bought of Mr E. B. Savage, The Square, Ringwood. New Guinea Collⁿ Mr Savage made his collection in New Guinea, at the time he was a missionary there	£45 for the whole Coll.		
	(No LXXXIII) Lime spoon from South Cape. This one represents a man beating a native drum... made of Ebony and used for conveying the lime to the mouth when chewing the "Betel" so that it shall mix with the lime in the mouth without first touching the lips			
	(No XXXIII) Charm which is worn about the body, and is supposed to keep away sickness, also kept in the house for the same purpose. from Maipua.			



DATE.	DRAWING AND DESCRIPTION OF OBJECT.	PRICE.	DEPOSITED AT.	REMOVED TO.
1899 Jan 23.	Bt. Webster. Bicester. New Guinea Charms			
		10/-		
		10/-		
		15/-		

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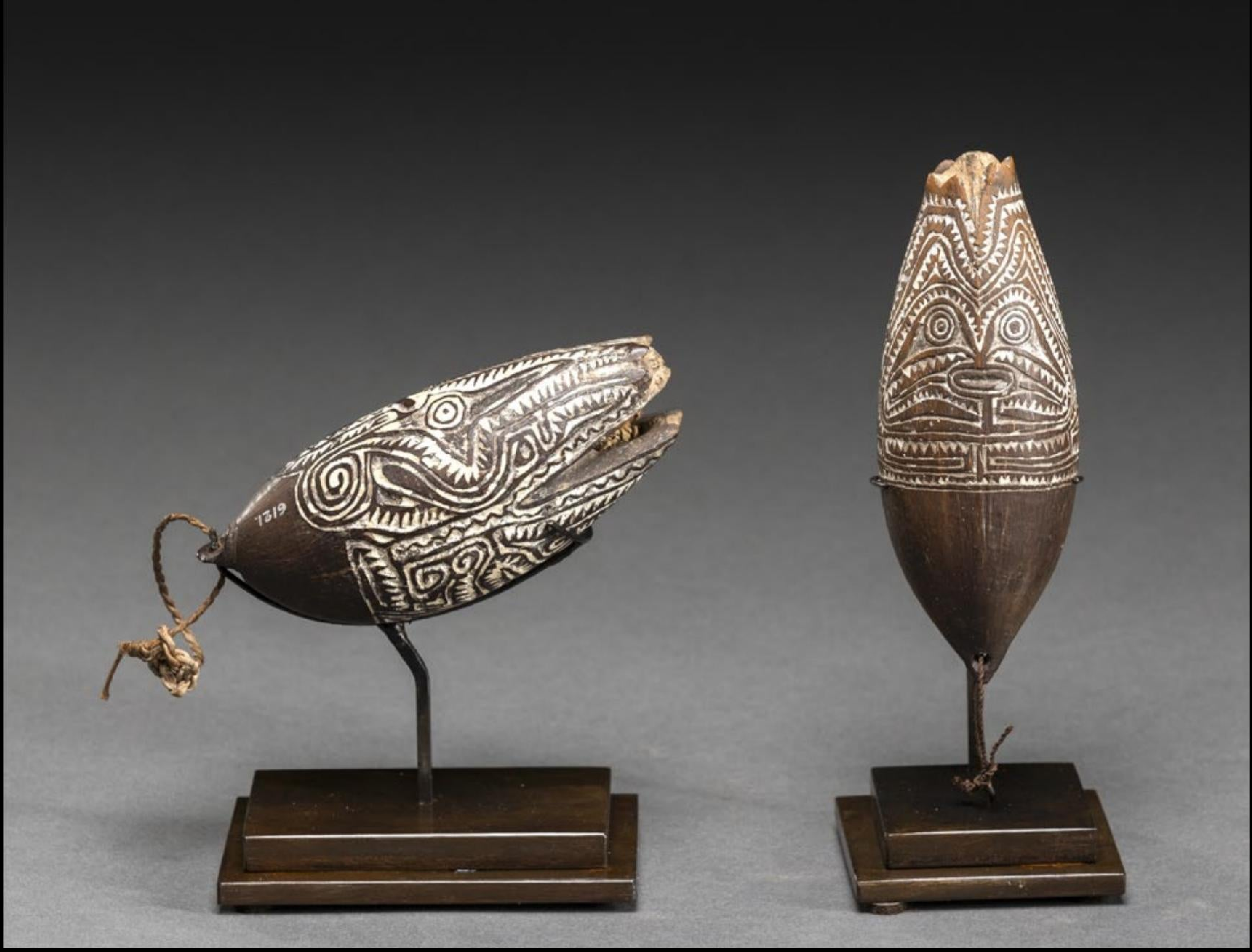
34 Two Papuan Gulf Marupai Charms

Purari Delta area, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea
Left is W. D. Webster, Bicester, UK and right was collected by the missionary Edwin Bentley Savage in Maipua village between 1885 and 1891(P.1039).
Left acquired by Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers from Webster on January 23, 1899 (6121).
Right was acquired by Pitt-Rivers on October 20, 1894.
Alexander Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, Rushmore, Dorset, by descent from the above by 1900
Captain George Pitt-Rivers, The Manor, Hinton St Mary, Dorset, by descent from the above by 1927
Stella Edith Lonsdale (Pitt-Rivers), London and Garéoult, by descent from the above by 1966
Gérald Minkoff and Muriel Olesen Collection, Geneva.
Left is Illustrated in the *Pitt Rivers Museum Acquisition Journal* Vol. 8. p.2190, right in *Pitt Rivers Museum Acquisition Journal* Vol. 3. p.1039.
Mid/late 19th century
Both are 5" (12.7 cm) in length

The left marupai has a wad of bush material stuffed in its mouth while the right one has a very sweet full figure carved on the opposite side. Their very early collection dates might account for the large amount of white lime infilling still in place.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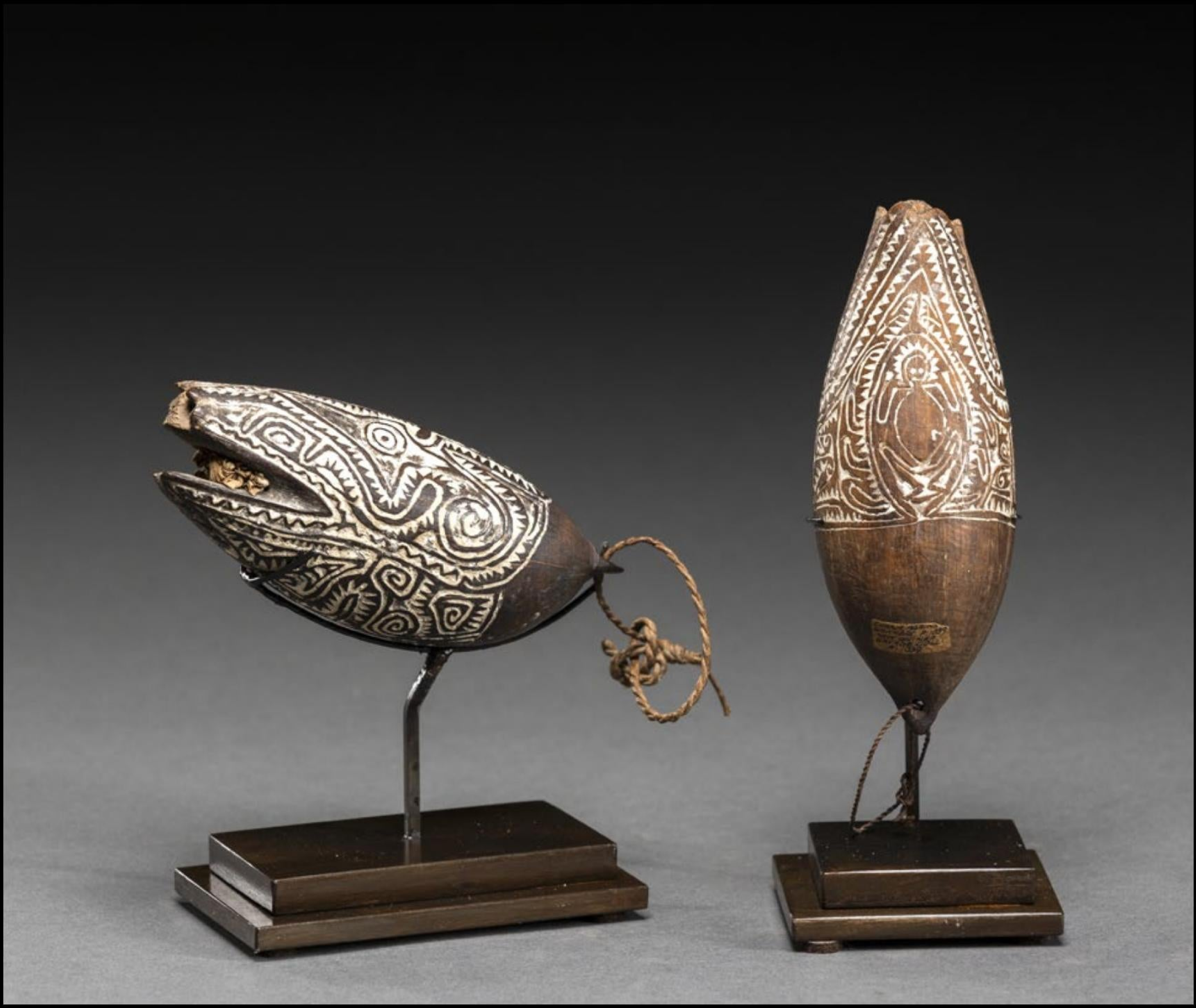
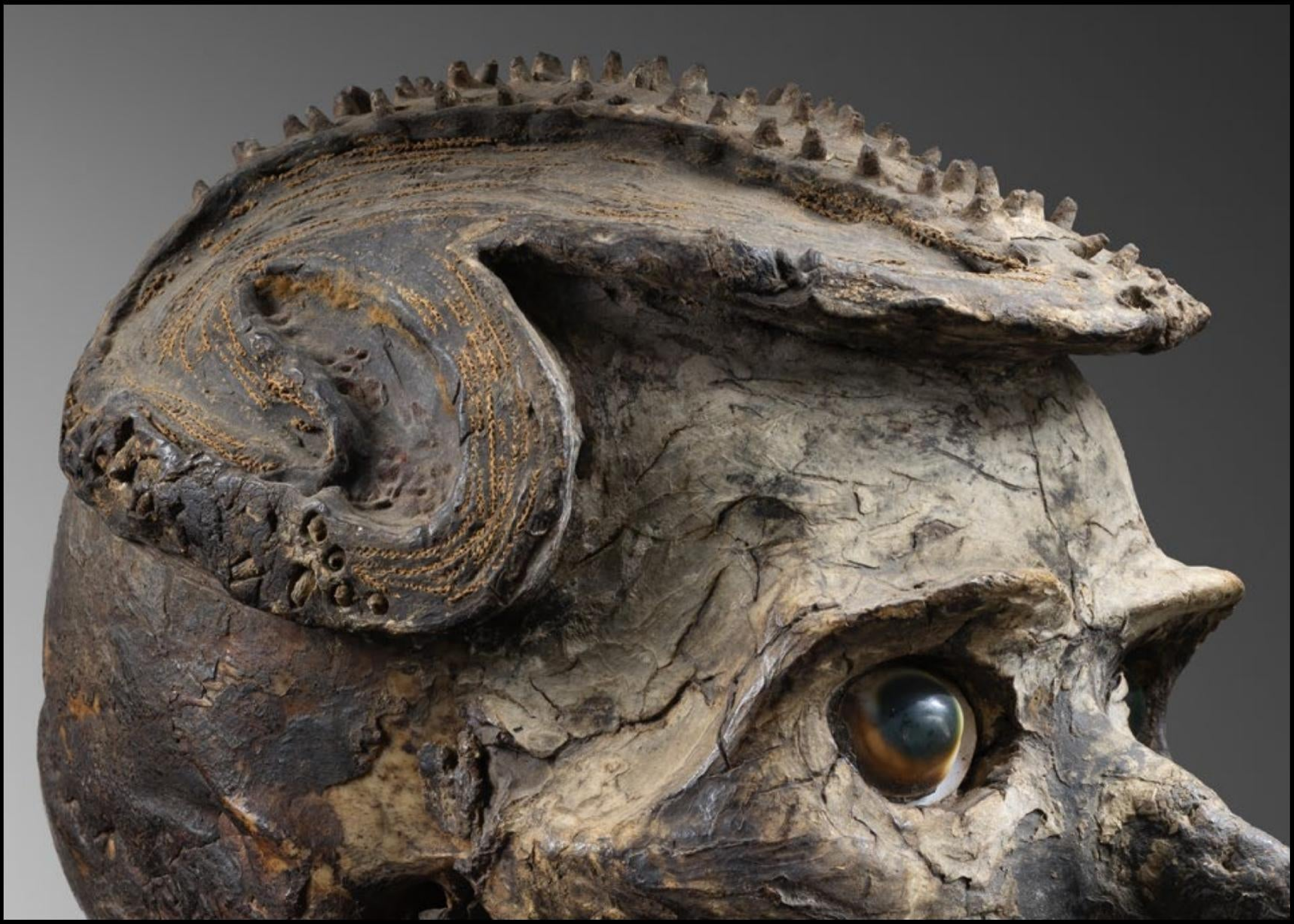
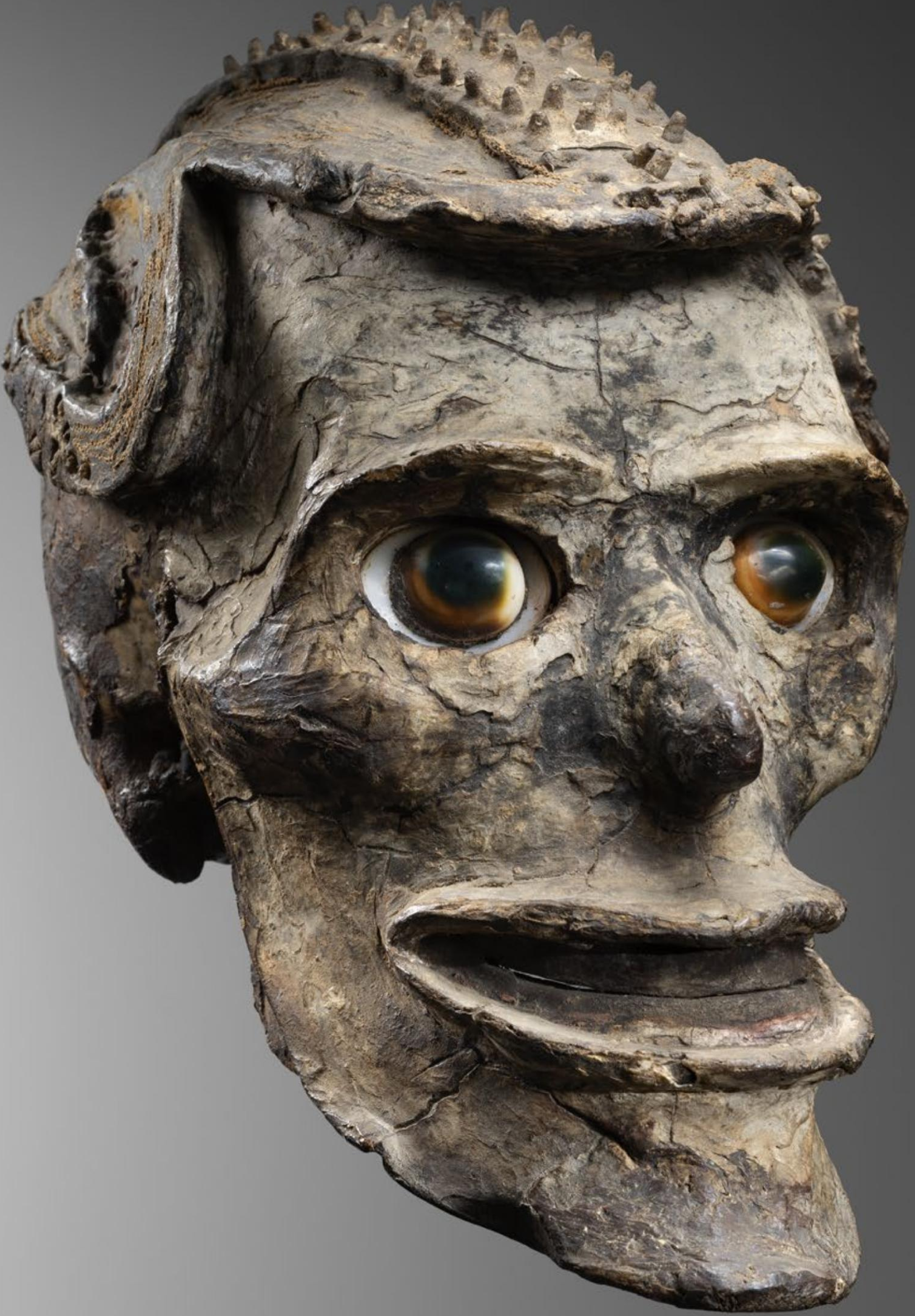




35 New Ireland Skull

New Ireland, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea
Arthur Speyer Collection, Berlin
Seeger Collection, Stuttgart
Ulrich Kortmann, Dortmund
Late 19th century
8 ¾" (22.2 cm) in length



Overmodeled Skulls from Central New Ireland

By Klaus Maaz

When Breton spoke of needing to surround himself with his objects and works because their contemplation "intoxicated" him and opened a window into another world, this sentiment applies especially to the Stuttgart collector Hermann Seeger. During our many encounters, I experienced this repeatedly in our hours-long discussions—this "immersion into other, often unknown worlds." Such was the case with the overmodeled New Ireland skull presented here. It stood beside Sepik overmodeled skulls in the Seeger collection. Ancient and unsettling—what a contrast. No naturalism here, but rather a being from the realm of the dead.

Otto Schlagenhaufen, who published the first major study of decorated skulls from the Sepik region and New Ireland 115 years ago, unfortunately described them as having "facial modeling that consistently gives the impression of a grotesque mask". The intense facial expression of this ceremonial skull, overmodeled with wild bee wax, is especially evoked by the eyes. In the recessed eye sockets, concave shell pieces from *Cypraea tigris* are inserted, with the operculum of the sea snail *Turbo petholatus* affixed at the center. Added to this is the broad, slightly open mouth with thick lips, which further intensifies the expression.

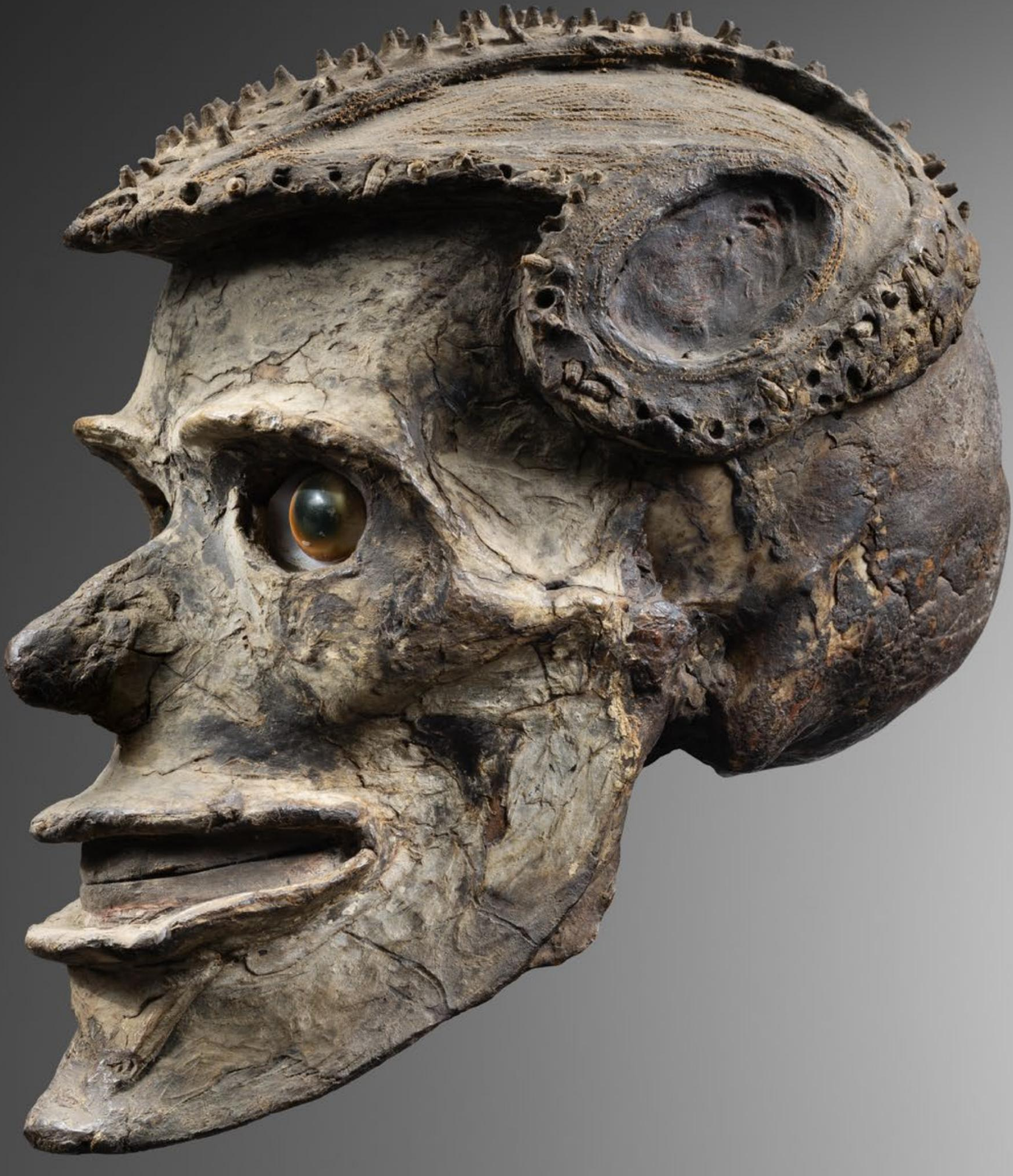
Hermann Seeger pointed out the unusual hairstyle, which resembled the traditional mourning coiffure of the New Ireland people. Augustin Krämer depicts an impressive rainmaker figure with an affixed skull and two decorative staffs, also topped with adorned skulls featuring these distinctive hairstyles. He refers to these skulls as *malanggan megatampirivit* and writes that they were used for "sun and rain making"—the former in the mountains where it always rains, the latter on the east coast during the dry season.

Overmodeled skulls also played a ritual role in the so-called *Uli* cult. These ceremonies were closely tied to the remembrance of important clan ancestors, with the transmission of power to the living and the preservation of social order being central motives for the rituals.

During the colonial period, many skulls—like the *malagane*, which were destroyed after ceremonial use—found their way into museums. Klaus Helfrich published 36 such specimens from the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin. It cannot be ruled out that some overmodeled skulls were made specifically for sale. Ulrich Menter suggests that skulls considered dangerous may have been neutralized by selling them to European collectors. He also speculates that in the early 20th century, "the collecting desires of Europeans were met by producing ceremonial skulls exclusively for sale".

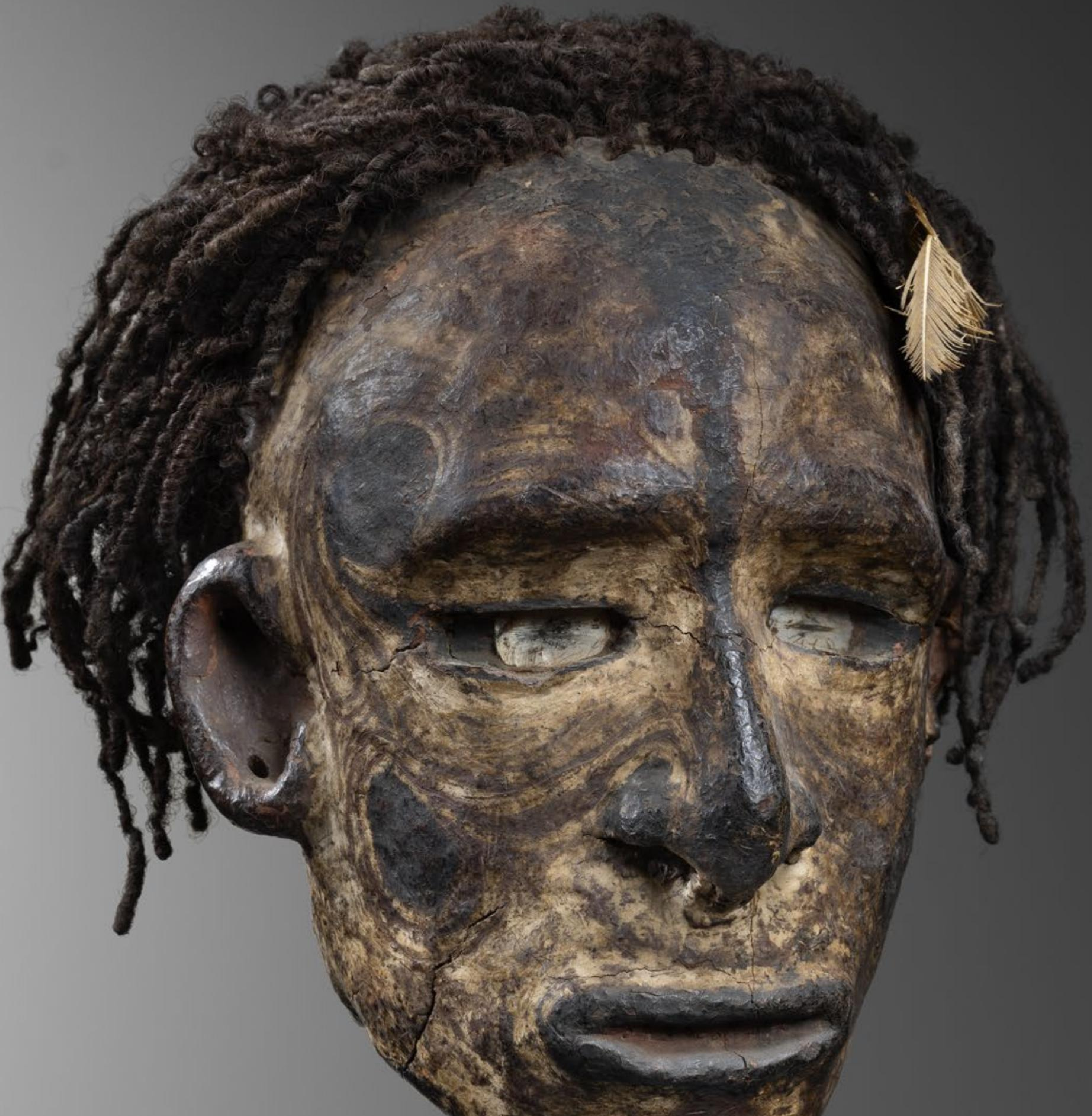
The ceremonial skull in the Hermann Seeger collection was highly valued by collectors. It is considered one of the outstanding, very old specimens and entered the Seeger collection through Arthur Speyer Sr. Those wishing to explore the function of these skulls in depth should consult the publication *Malangan Metampiriwit* by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, who has provided a comprehensive and up-to-date scholarly account of these remarkable ceremonial skulls.

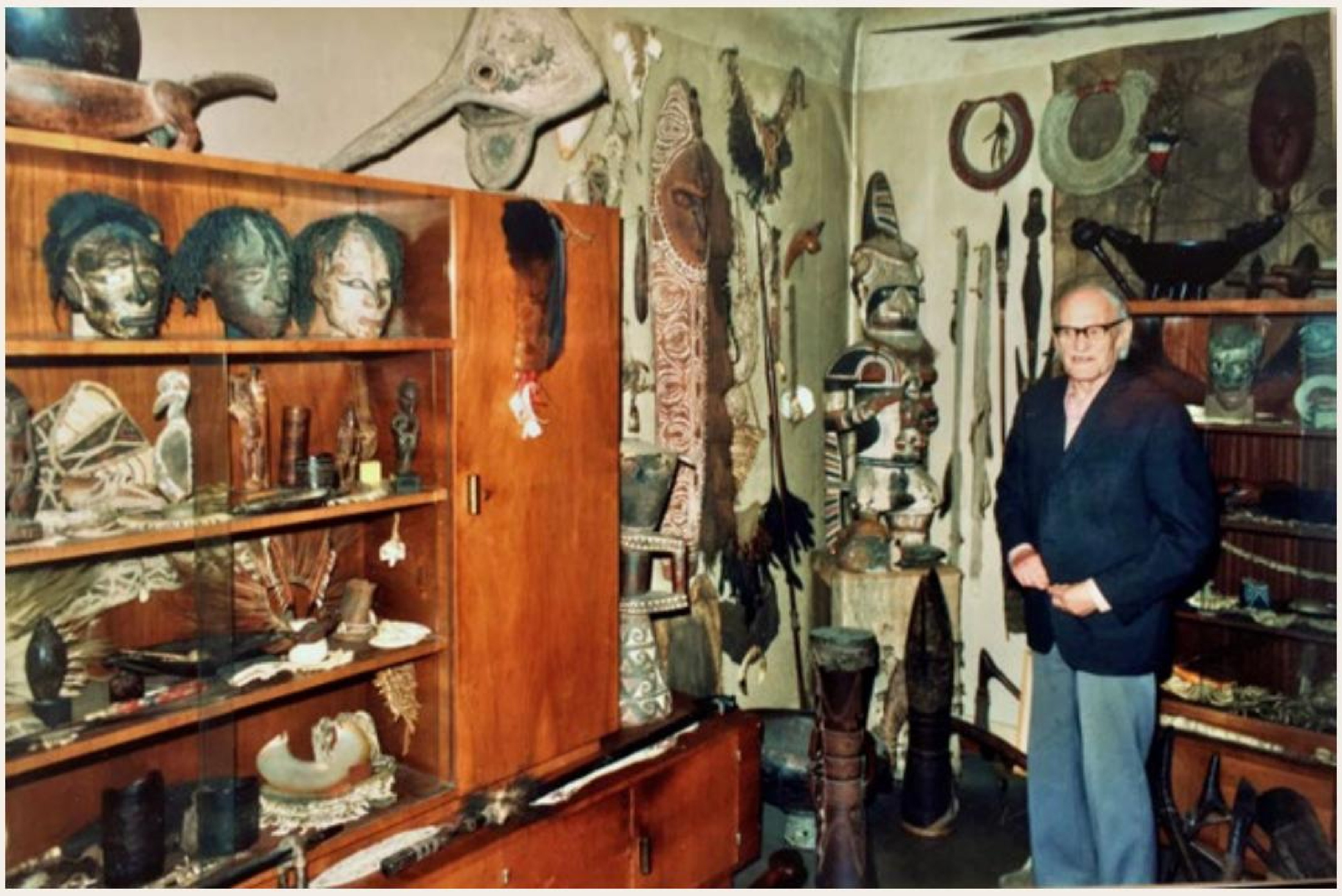
Hermann Seeger standing in front of his New Ireland skull circa 1980s, Stuttgart, Germany.



36 Middle Sepik Overmodeled Skull

Iatmul culture area, Middle Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Seeger Collection, Stuttgart
Ulrich Kortmann, Dortmund
Late 19th century
8 ½” (21.6 cm) in length





Hermann Seeger with his collection
circa 1980s.

My First Encounter with Hermann Seeger and His Overmodeled Sepik Skulls

By Klaus Maaz

Anyone who has studied the cultures of North American Indians or the South Seas would sooner or later come across the name of the Stuttgart collector Hermann Seeger. I learned during our first meeting in the early 1980s that he shared a lifelong interest in South Sea artifacts with his more publicly active collector friend Ernst Heinrich. Expecting a dignified and reserved eighty-year-old, I was mistaken. A slender, agile man who reminded me of the poet Hermann Hesse warmly invited me into his home.

I entered an atmosphere unlike anything I had experienced before. Surrounding me—on the walls, in, on, and under the cabinets—were objects from New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. Sitting relaxed in a leather armchair, Hermann Seeger looked at me with kind eyes. He clearly enjoyed my intense interest and my curious, admiring gaze. When I finally identified a tapa beater from the island of Kaniet, I felt accepted as a novice collector, and our conversation gained momentum.

Hermann Seeger was spontaneous, engaging, and possessed remarkable knowledge. He encouraged me to handle the objects I was interested in. I sensed that he enjoyed our discussion, and there was much to talk about. Naturally, the skulls displayed in a cabinet immediately caught my eye, though I had only seen such skulls in museums and literature before. One stood out clearly from the others I knew due to its masterful craftsmanship.

Undoubtedly, a sensitive artist had paid close attention to the smallest details in the overmodeling and further design of the head: a slightly open mouth with confidently shaped lips, a skillful transition into an exquisitely shaped nose, the flow into gently raised eyebrows, masterfully recessed eyes, and finally a perfectly sculpted forehead. The cleverly used twisted locks of human hair and the artfully placed long feather completed the masterpiece of the unknown artist from the middle Sepik region in the most excellent way.

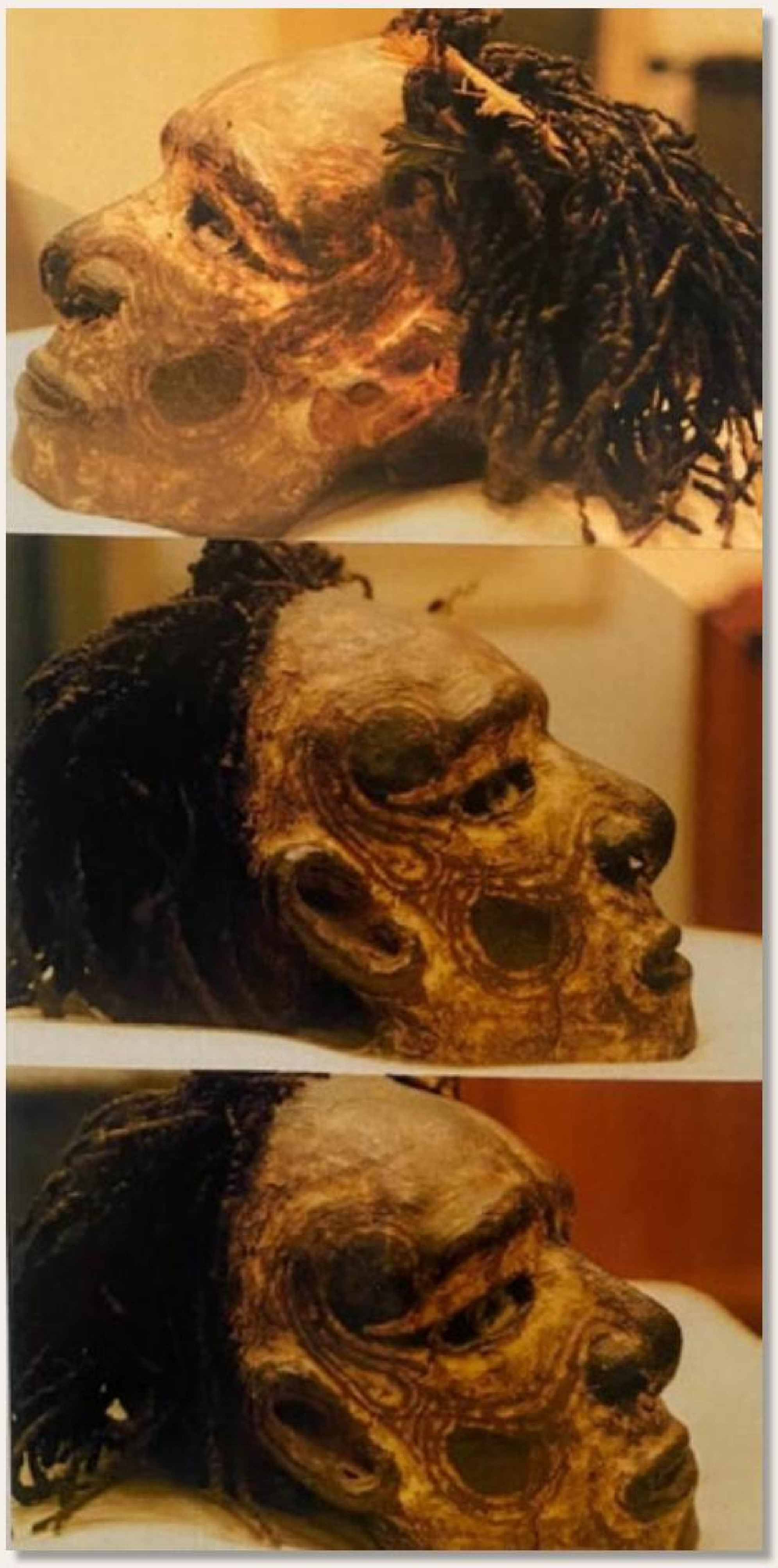
Although skulls had never been among the objects I paid particular attention to, my initial hesitation gave way to unreserved admiration. The experienced collector Seeger noted my enthusiasm with satisfaction and remarked that I had recognized a quality in the skull that he himself had not previously been aware of. When I asked to take photographs, he immediately agreed and helped me position the skull in the right light.

We then looked at the 32 skulls published by Heinz Kelm in the first “Art from the Sepik” catalog and agreed that the one shown there (figs. 262/263) was probably the most beautiful skull in the world.

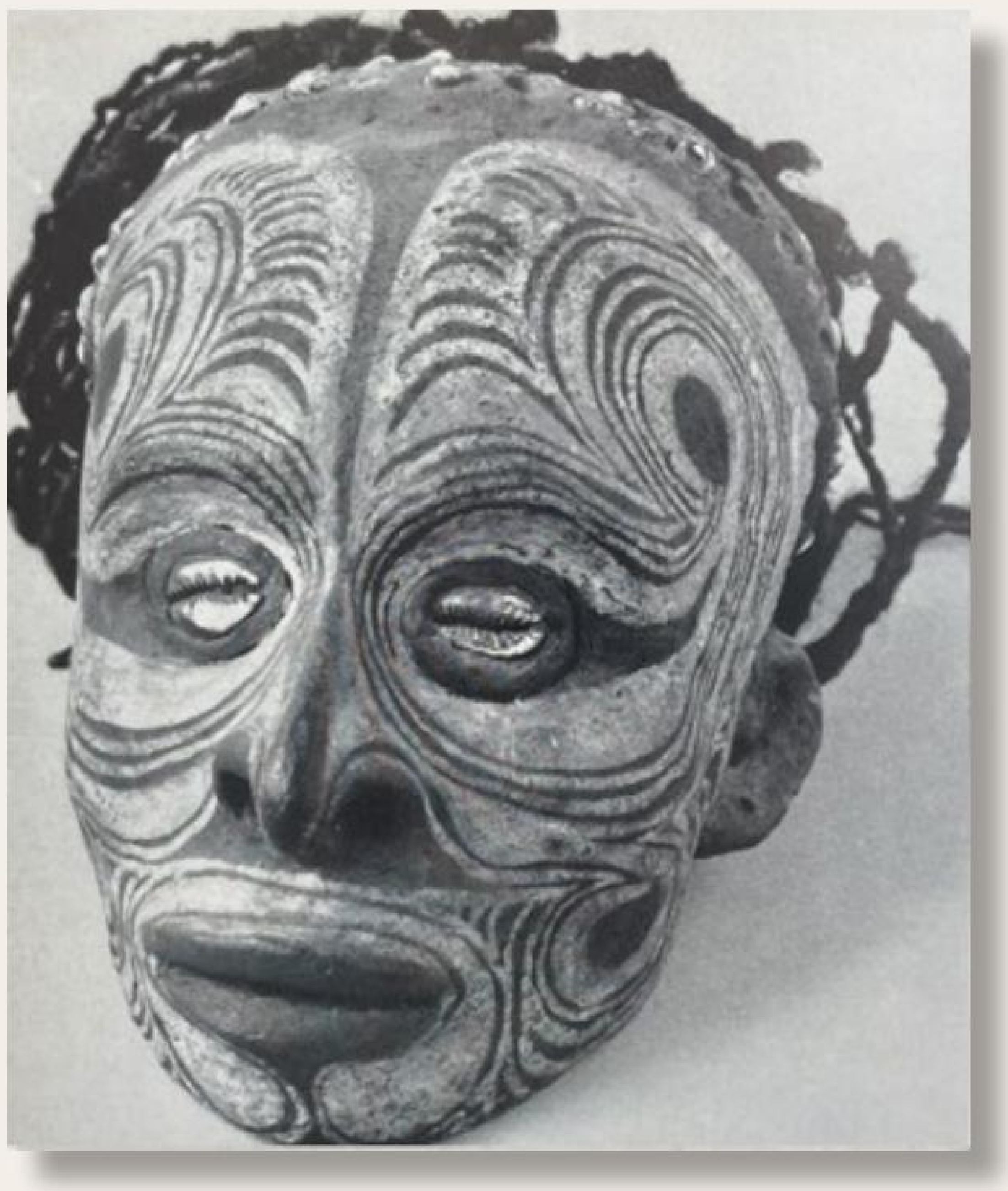
However, the Seeger’s specimen stood out for its distinctly realistic character, which is rarely found among the many Sepik skulls kept in museums and private collections. After lengthy comparisons, prompted by the question of why this skull had such a strong naturalistic aura, we agreed that the design of the eyes made the difference.

It is generally assumed that about 90% of Sepik skulls use cowrie shells to represent the eyes. Although Heinz Kelm believes that the openings of the cowrie shells “convincingly imitate the eyelid slit and eyelashes,” Hermann Seeger and I felt they appeared rather alien.

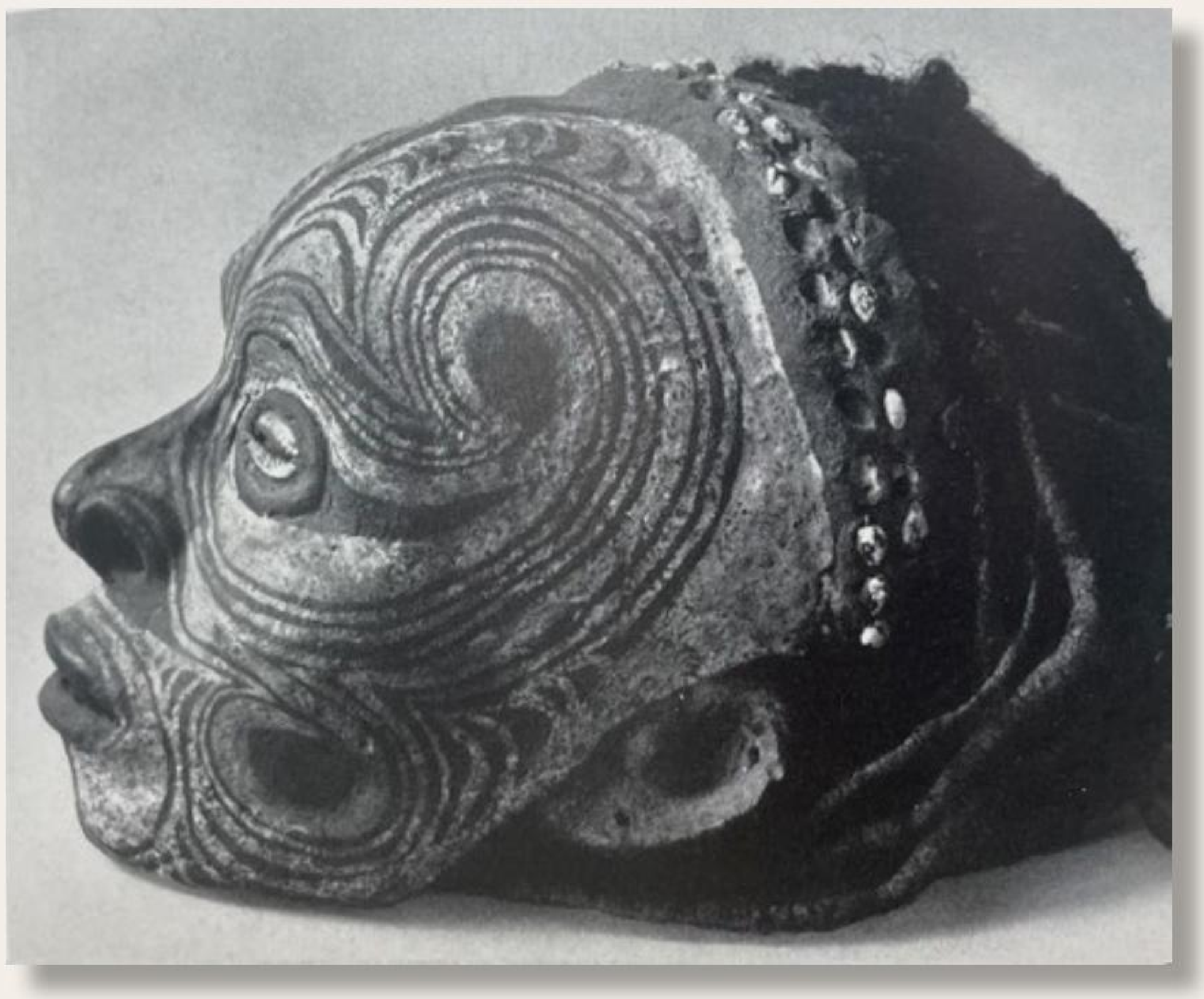
The experienced collector loved discussions like these, but also those about the most inconspicuous things, such as the production of the finest plant fiber cords. We continued these personal sessions regularly over the following years; they often lasted into the late evening hours. They were subsequently continued through a long-standing correspondence. When Hermann Seeger died at the age of 95 in May 1997, I lost an unusually intense and exciting conversational partner who had greatly expanded my interest in the material culture of South Sea peoples.

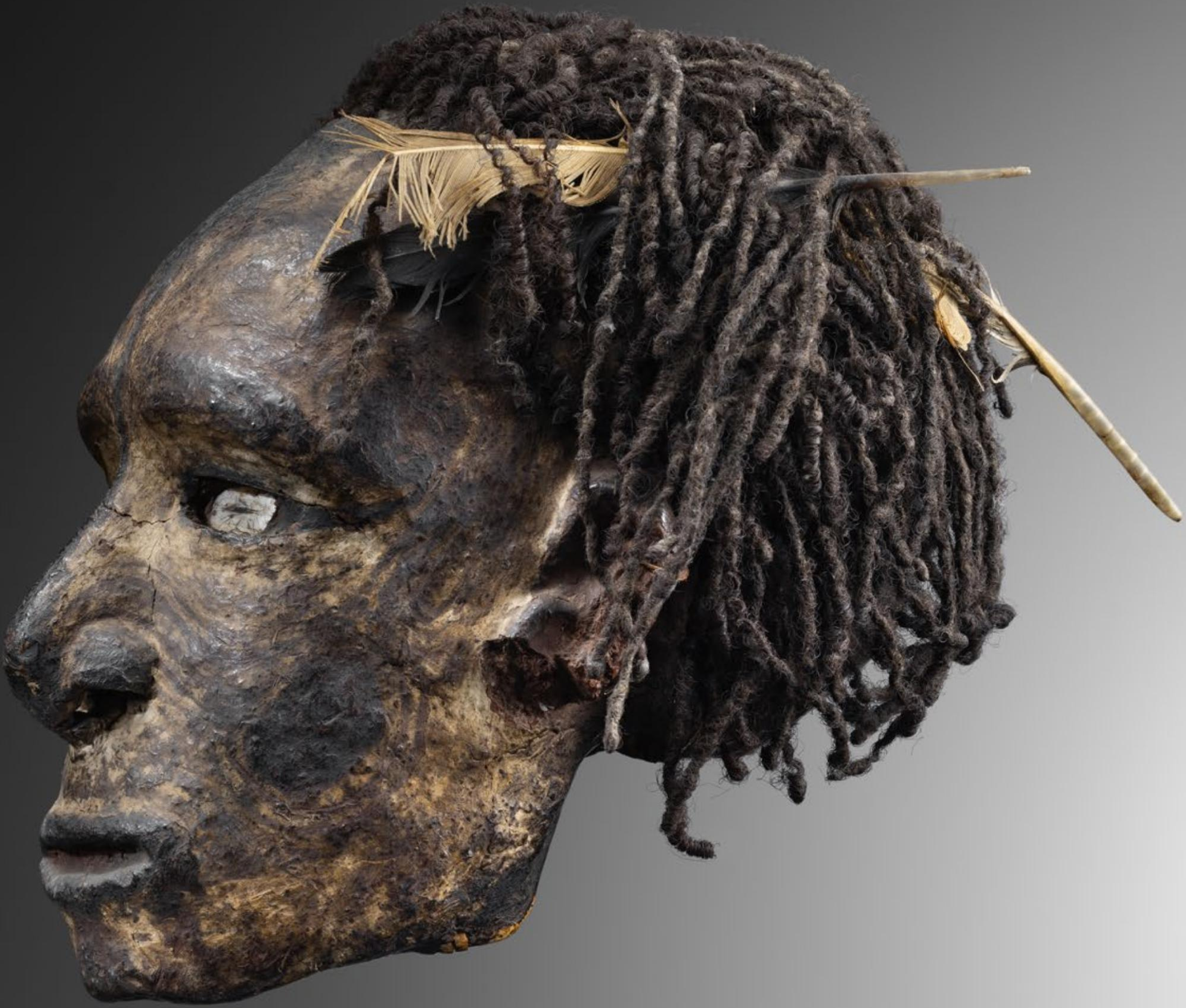


These photographs of the Sepik skull were taken with Hermann Seeger’s help during our first meeting in the early 1980s.



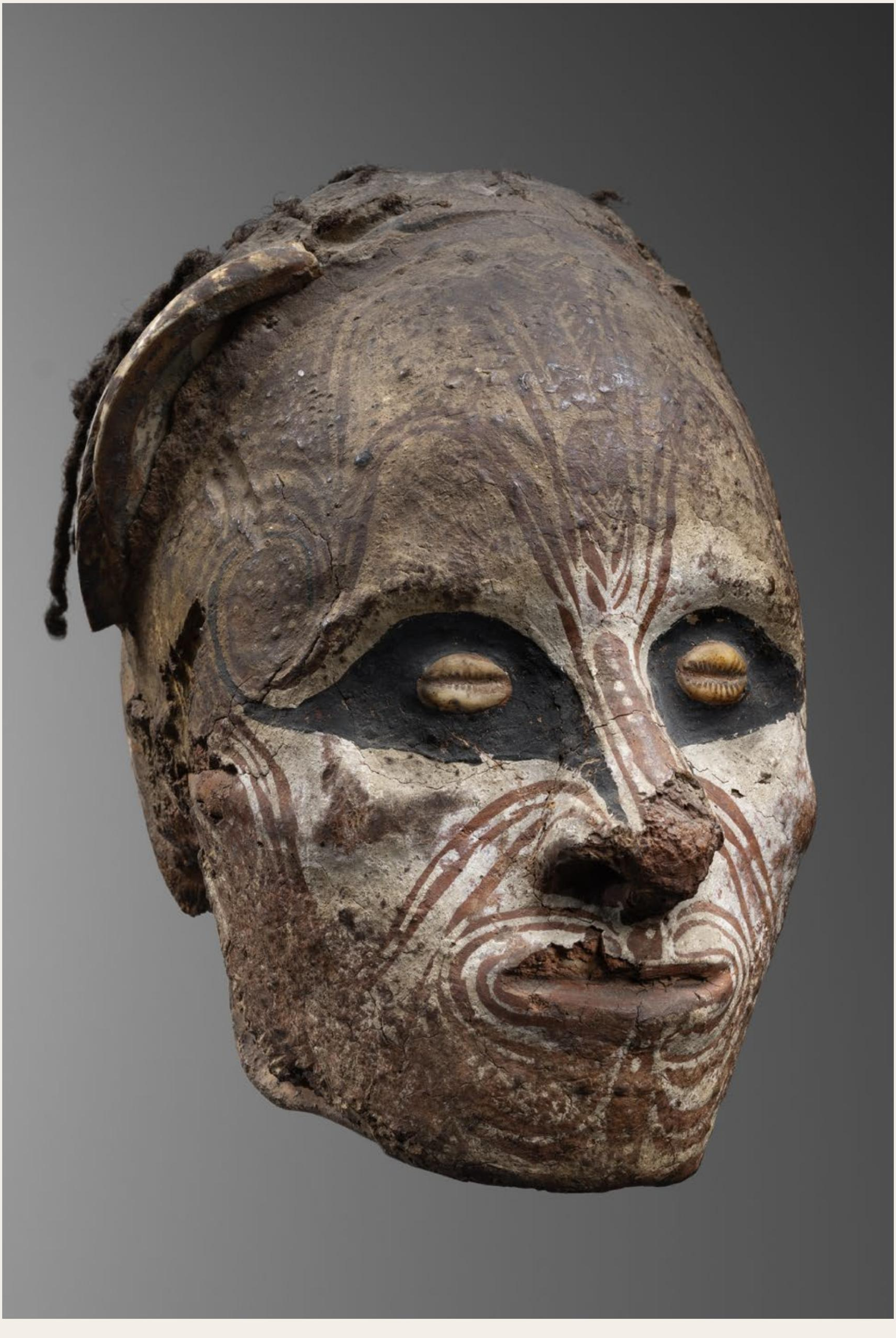
Kunst Vom Sepik fig. 262/263, Kararau village, Middle Sepik River, VI 45 892





37 Middle Sepik Overmodeled Skull

Iatmul culture area, Middle Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Zemanek-Munster Auction, 24 November 2007
Ulrich Kortmann, Dortmund
Late 19th century
8 ½” (21.6 cm) in length



Overmodeled Skull from the Middle Sepik

By Klaus Maaz

Overmodeled human skulls from the Middle Sepik are frequently found in museums with Melanesian collections. They have garnered significant attention not only as art objects but have also become renowned for their often outstanding artistic craftsmanship.

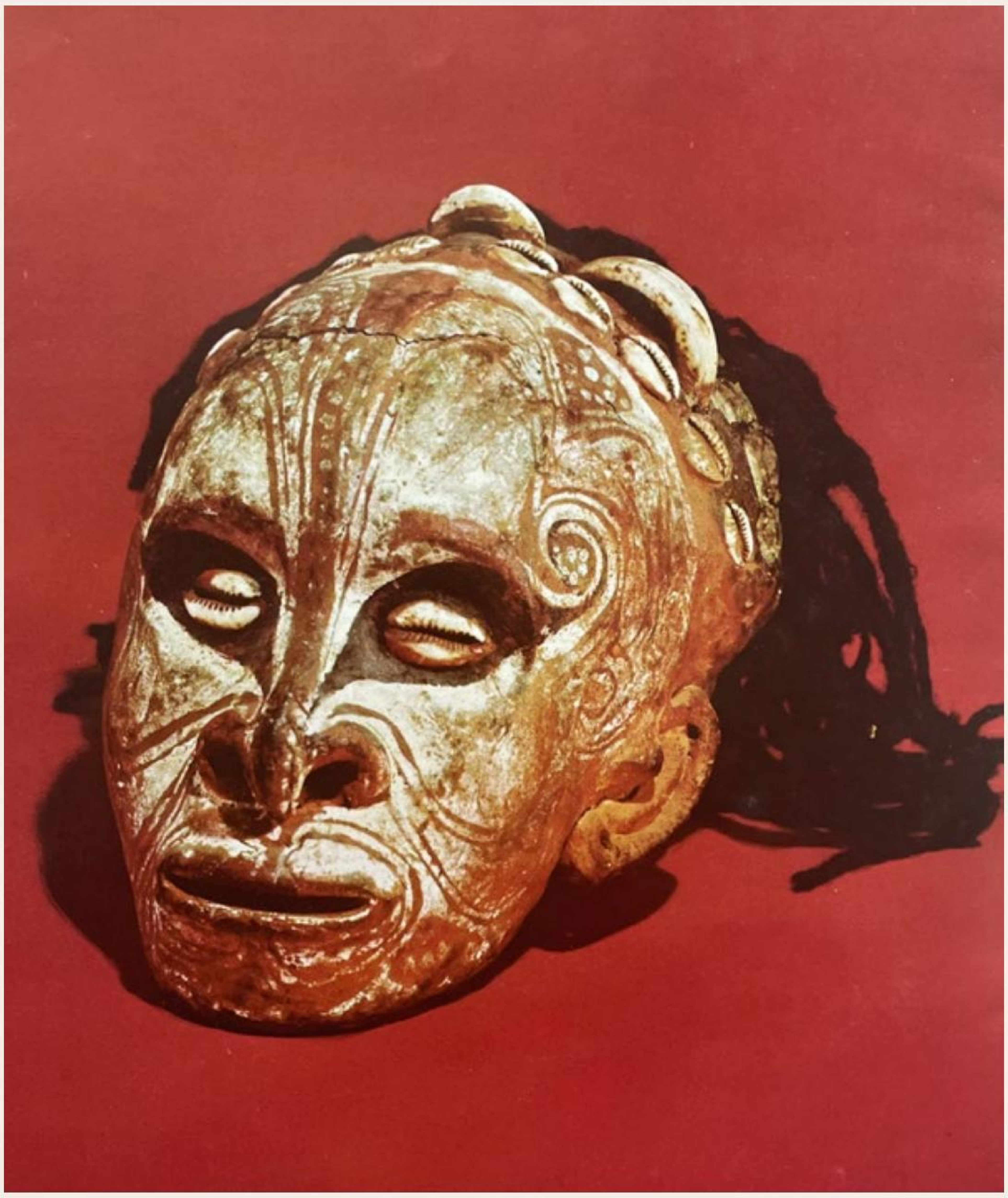
Only a portion of these skulls truly meet this high standard. The one presented here, despite slight damage, is a work of a great artist from the Middle Sepik—both in its realistic overmodeling and its magnificent painting. Based on a very similar skull in the University of Pennsylvania collection with documented provenance, the skull shown here can be attributed to an Iatmul artist from the Middle Sepik.

This comparison also raises the question of whether the view expressed by various scholars—that the facial features of the deceased were reproduced as accurately as possible in the overmodeling—is still tenable. The subsequent mostly curvilinear painting is said to represent the facial decoration worn by the deceased during festivals or war expeditions.

Other similarly crafted skulls can be found in Kelm, Volume I, Figures 274 and 278, and in Otto Reche's *Der Kaiserin Augusta-Fluss*, Hamburg 1913, Plate LXVIII, 1. These examples suggest that doubts may arise as to whether the overmodeling and painting of a skull truly depict a specific deceased individual.

Notes

1. See Heinz Kelm: *Kunst vom Sepik*, Volume 1, Berlin 1966, Figures 240–279.
2. Allen Wardwell: *The Art of the Sepik River*, Chicago 1971, Frontispiece.
3. Ingrid Hermann: *Linden-Museum Stuttgart, South Seas Department*, Stuttgart 1989, p. 118.
4. Bernd Leicht: *Faces of Clay. Overmodeled Skulls of the Iatmul*, p. 154 in: Alfried Wieczorek, Wilfried Rosendahl (eds.), *Skulls*, Mannheim 2011.

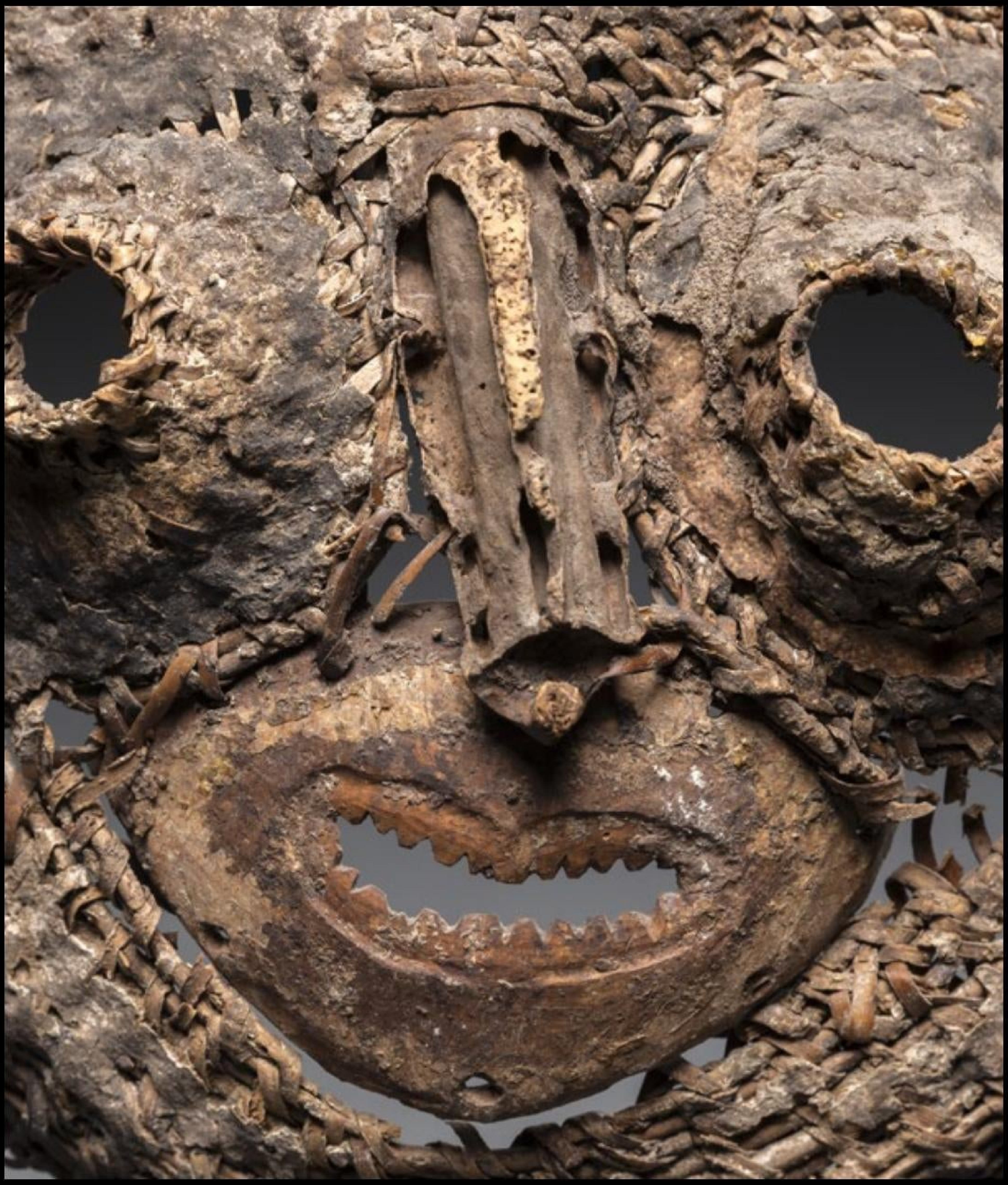


Skull (Timbunke Village) – Iatmul culture, Middle Sepik River, PNG. Collected by Capt. H. around 191. University Museum Pennsylvania. Color illustration in Allen Wardwell: *The Art of the Sepik River*, Chicago 1971.

38 Abelam Cane Yam Mask, *Bapa Mene*

Tiyandekim village, Southern Abelam area, the Wosera, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea
Michael Kremerskothen Collection, Dortmund
Ex. Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede, Rye, NY
Sam & Sharon Singer Collection, San Francisco
Published in *Art of the Abelam*, Michael Hamson, 2015, no. 103
Early/mid 20th century
10 ¼" (26 cm) in height

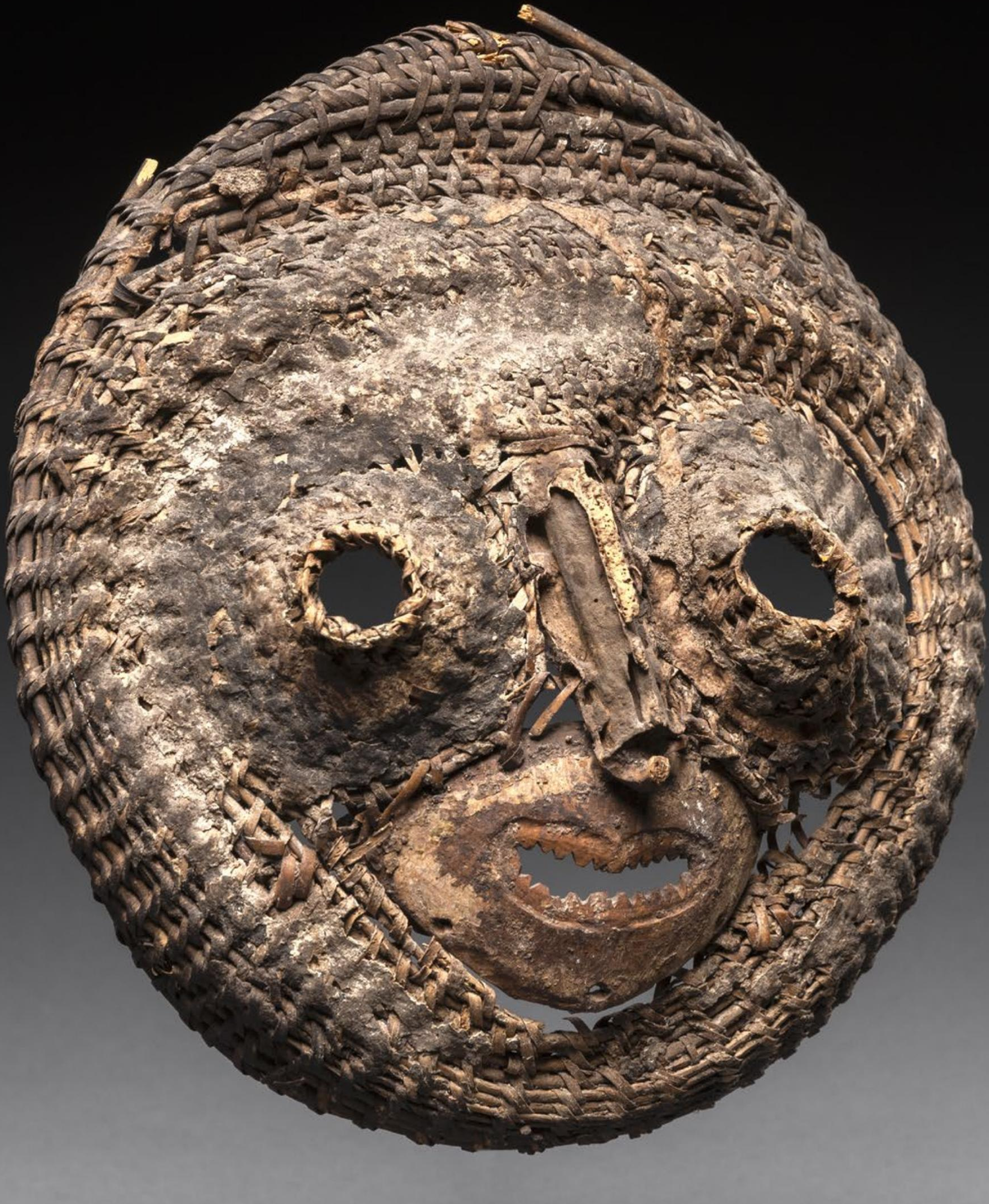
A child's plastic doll's face has been ingeniously incorporated into this old and well-used yam mask. The Abelam were admired for the long yams they grew and feared for the magic and spiritual power they brought to the task. When Western pigments and materials became available Abelam artists enthusiastically incorporated them into their ritual objects. The doll's face would have manifested the power of the outsiders and could bolster the potency of their own magic. The end result is a yam mask with an otherworldly presence made more haunting by the rat-gnawed hole in the skull and blackened patina from decades suspended from the rafters.

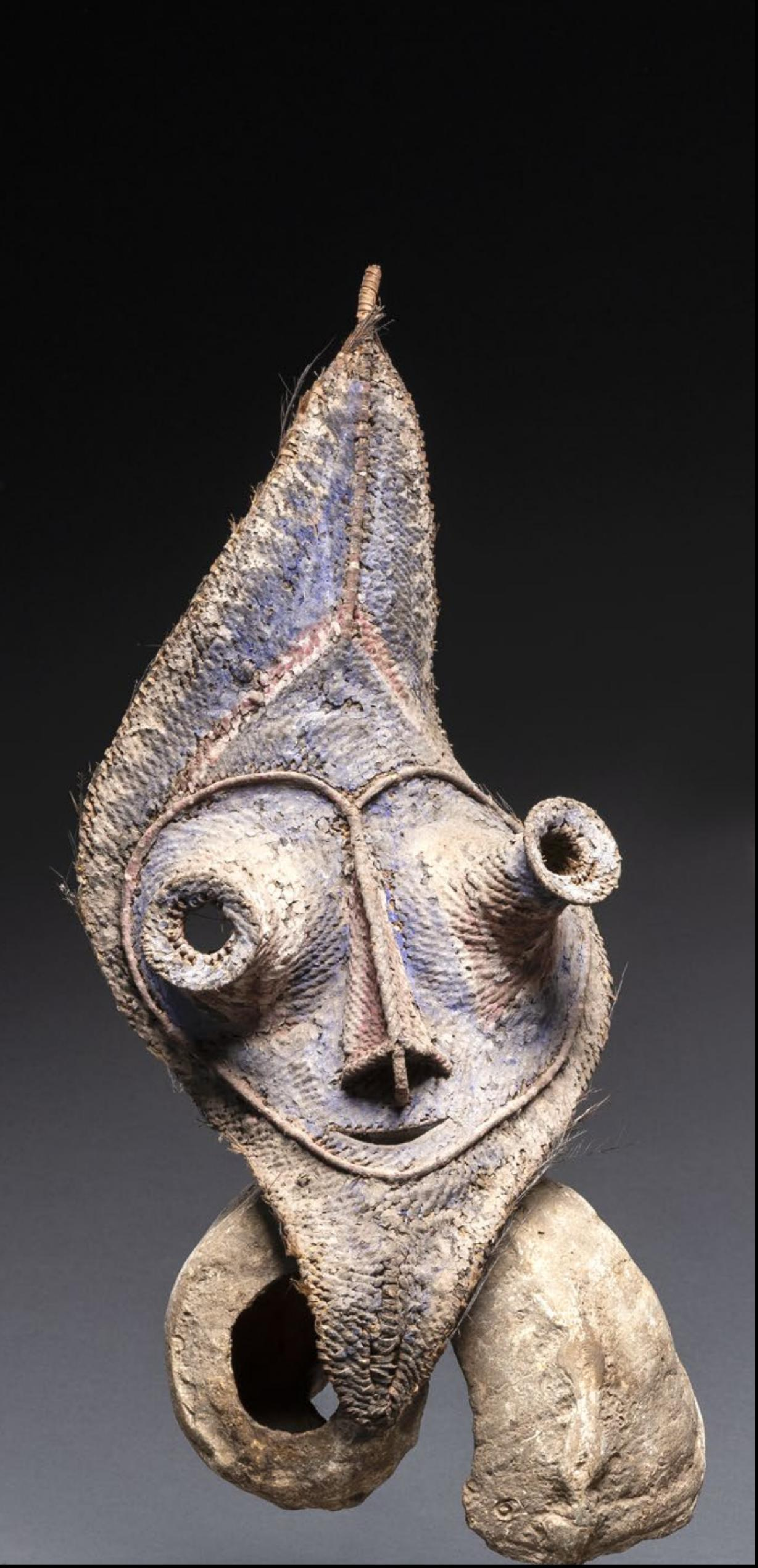


39 Boiken Fiber Mask

Nagum Boiken area, Coastal Prince Alexander Mountains, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Field collected by Michael Hamson
Ex. Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede, Rye, New York
Harry Tracosas Collection, Madison, WI
Published Michael Hamson Oceanic Art San Francisco 2015, no. 10
Late 19th century
10¾” (27.3 cm) in height

The Nagum Boiken people centered around Sassoya station in the coastal Prince Alexander Mountains have some of the most interesting art of Papua New Guinea and virtually all of it has never been studied. Without me personally field collecting the mask, I would have no clue to its cultural attribution, as I have never seen a mask like this with its cane structure, coconut shell mouth, and wooden nose.





40 Set of Yangoru Boiken *Talipun*

Yangoru area, Prince Alexander
Mountains, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea
Michael Kremerskothen, Dortmund
Early/mid 20th century
20 ¾” (52.8 cm), 22” (55.8 cm) and
17 ¾” (45.2 cm) in height

Within tribal art, a close adherence to a classic or archetypal form is almost a universal principle. Undoubtably all individual artists put their own creativity into the work, but there is at the same time, a great importance in following prescribed conventions. This is largely true throughout Oceania but this strict obedience to a particular canon breaks down a bit more often in New Guinea. None more so than with the Boiken, whose artistic guidelines passed down from one’s grandfather seems only to serve as a launching pad for many artists. The Boiken are fiercely egalitarian, and the artists often have a competitive streak of one-upmanship to them. I found no other artform where artistic license is seemingly so unlimited as with the *Talipun* bride price payments. The cane and wood constructions attached to green turban seashells come in an endless variety of styles and forms. There is an almost gleeful freedom to them that is of a different level altogether. The present three are all classic *Masalai* spirits with leaf-shaped faces and tubular eyes but the expressions and colors create true individuality and character.

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